NEON GENESIS
EVANGELION
ANIMA
4
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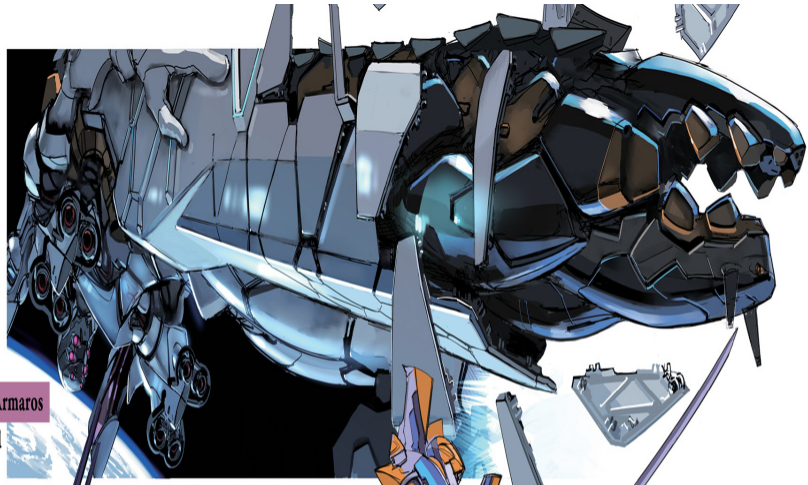
The seven-colored bolt fired from the great bow Azumaterasu obliterates over half of the 430-kilometer-wide detached lunar landmass as it is 100,000 kilometers away from the Earth.
Trois activates Eva-0.0's physical shield and A.T. Field to survive the gamma-ray storm.
EVANGELION
ANIMA
4



The black giant Armaros lifted his halberd overhead and spun it.

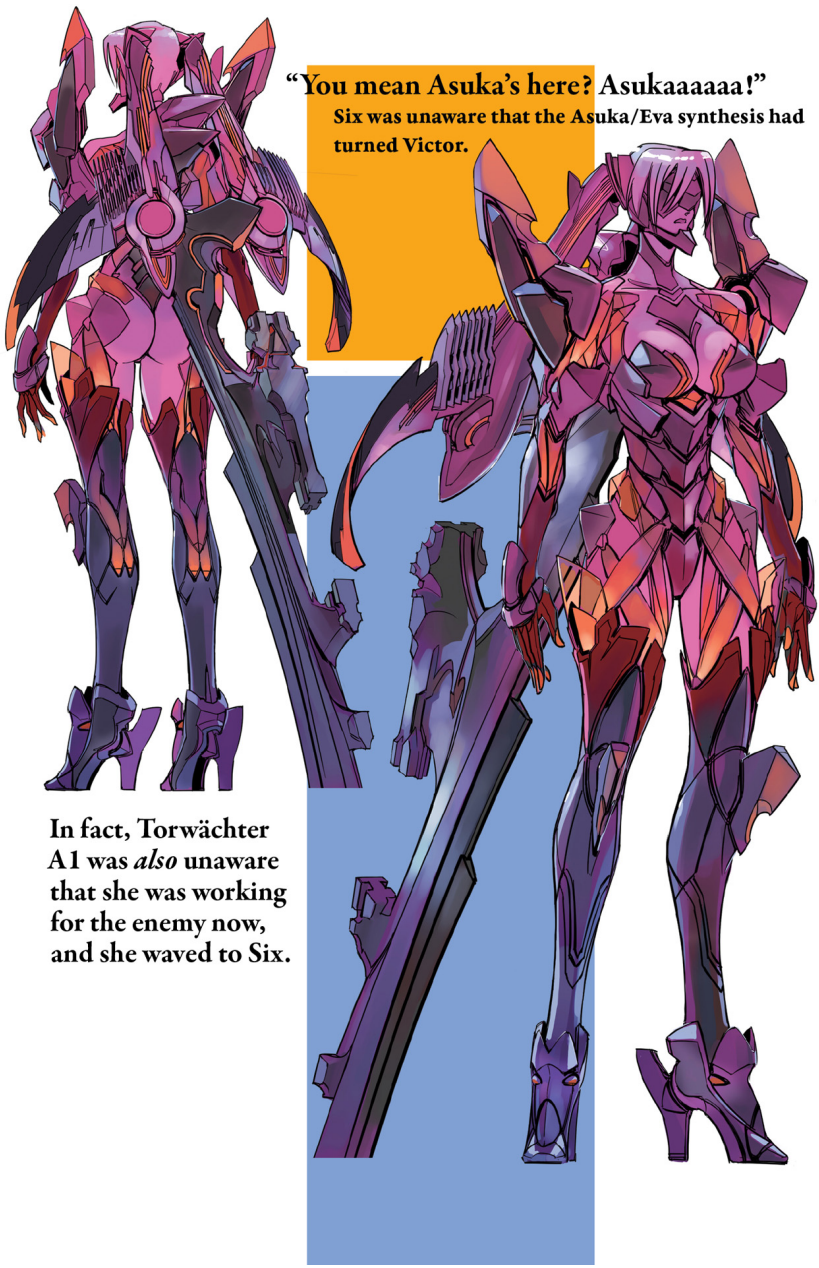
Eva Euro-II Heurtebise

《Don't worry, this is just the barrel of the Devil's Backbone.》

《*Waaaah!*》

EVA-00 TYPE-F ALLEGORICA

This is the barrel of the Angel's Backbone. The total length of this firing system isn't much different from the previous model, but the barrel is now made of the spine of discarded Eva-00s, making it three times longer than the prototype.



"You mean Asuka's here? Asukaaaaaa!"

Six was unaware that the Asuka/Eva synthesis had turned Victor.

In fact, Torwächter A1 was *also* unaware that she was working for the enemy now, and she waved to Six.

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

ANIMA

VOLUME 4

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Seven Seas Entertainment

EVANGELION ANIMA VOL. 4

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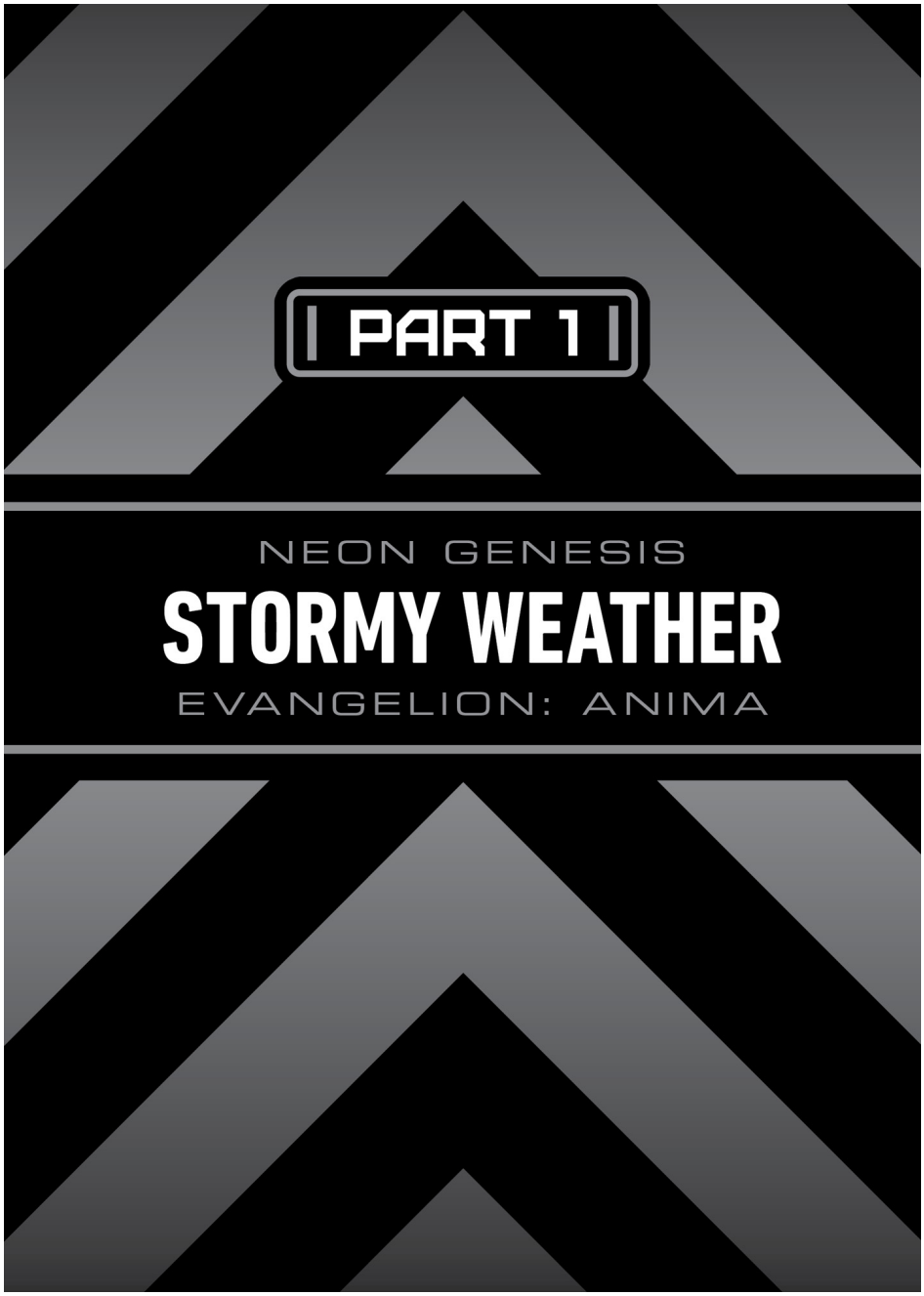

PART 1
NEON GENESIS
STORMY WEATHER
EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 1:
Watermelon Patch in the Morning Mist

"WHAT HAPPENED HERE?!" Shinji shouted.

He'd come to visit Kaji's watermelon patch for the first time in what felt like ages and was shocked to find the land eviscerated and hollowed out. He let go of the electric wheelbarrow that contained his farming equipment, and the machine wobbled, looking like it was about to topple, before correcting its center of gravity.

"Is it because the Chronostatic Sphere disappeared?"

Shinji surveyed the area and discovered that it was nothing so significant. There were scribbles written on the scrap of reinforced wall that had become the watermelon patch's home.

I've taken your watermelons. –Six

The early morning sun shone down on the eastern side of the volcano, casting the shadow of the mountain's summit over Hakone's western walls. The inside of the caldera was dim despite the clear skies. This blackout was due to the thick morning mist generated by Lake Ashi sinking to the bottom of the crater.

The lake's shore was much higher than the caldera, now that the ground had sunk a good three to four hundred meters below its original height, making the futuristic city look more like a rural village enveloped in fog.

"Wait, what?" In the solitude of the mist, Shinji puzzled over the tiny criminal's confession. "What could she possibly want a whole watermelon patch for?"

"Well, you see…"

A squat brown shape broke through the mist and revealed itself as Azuchi. Holding her leash was the gray figure of Rei Trois.

"The first thing Six did upon the completion of the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was move the watermelon patch."

The clock showed half past five. The pair had their own set of duties waiting for them right after breakfast, which meant early

morning was the only time of day when they had sunlight to themselves.

"Morning. You out for a walk with, uhh…Momo, is it?"

"Momo is missing. This is Azuchi."

This was Azuchi's walking route with Six, and Trois basically let the golden retriever lead her wherever she wanted to go.

"Momo is missing.
This is Azuchi."
?

“Come on,” Trois returned her attention to Shinji. “I asked the commander for directions to the patch, and she said it was going to take some walking.”

Shinji tilted his head before hurrying to push his electric wheelbarrow again. They were going downhill now, and it looked like Trois was leading them toward the lake.

“Did she scoop the whole patch up with Unit Zero’s hands? Why would she do that?”

Trois pulled back on Azuchi’s leash, slowing her pace to an enthusiastic trot, though even this was enough to sway Trois’ hair.

“She wanted to protect your patch by moving it to an area less affected by the environmental changes.”

Trois’ light blue hair darkened to pitch black at the ends from the corruption of the Q.R. Signum. She’d taken the brunt of its tainting influence inside Super Eva to protect Shinji.

“That’s probably what she had in mind…” Thoughts of Rei Six preoccupied Trois. She hardly noticed she was talking to herself.

“What…?”

The statement sounded like an afterthought. But for Trois, the Ayanami with the inferiority complex, not to have compared herself to Six, the most distinct of the Ayanamis, was quite an accomplishment. The mere feat of compartmentalization might have been a sign of Trois’ budding individuality.

Shinji stared at her back, mesmerized by the fluttering of her dress. She noticed his gaze and turned to meet it, but Shinji immediately looked away.

Their surroundings suddenly brightened as sunlight finally reached the caldera floor. Their eyes hurt from mist refracting the golden rays. Trois seemed to be engulfed by them. It would be some time until the mist burned off and they could see again.

Beyond the white glare of the sun, over the creeping wall of light, lay the heavenly body that had become their destination.

Glass Egg was the name given to the structure found buried at the bottom of Lake Ashi after its water levels had been greatly reduced. The

transparent egg was 666 meters in diameter and had a ninety-meter-wide opening that served as a gate, as well as ventilation for everything within it. The Glass Egg was currently lying on its side, as if toppled over. The Japanese government had tried to repurpose it into a disaster-proof shelter, but had withdrawn when the base of the Izu Peninsula, now home of Tokyo-3, was hit by a massive cave-in. Plans to move the central government to the Hakone caldera would have to wait.

Azuchi, Trois, and Shinji began climbing the long, limp bridge that linked the aperture with the outside. The transparent shell allowed them to see, albeit hazily, several decks of finished flooring within.

"It's like a newly made ship in a bottle."

Pipes had been installed in the perfect circle of a tunnel, which allowed it to transport people, things, and electricity into the Glass Egg. Two gigantic blowers stood at the end of it, one for intake and one for exhaust.

"These can't be very effective. They should really open up more holes for ventilation."

"Only problem is, they can't seem to put a scratch on the eggshell."

The Glass Egg's thickness and resilience to all forms of cutting technology had made it the prime candidate for converting into a shelter. Alas, the tunnel was its only opening, and all attempts at even perforating the shell had failed. Indeed, scientists were still baffled as to the Glass Egg's material, or if it was even made of matter at all. The thing might have been a force field for all they knew.

It did, however, resemble something in the records. The Glass Egg was the exact shape and size of Lilith's Chronostatic Sphere, which had disappeared from Central Dogma. Of course, this hypothesis was impossible to prove, given the information at hand.

When the Human Instrumentality Project failed three years ago, Lilith had formed the Chronostatic Sphere around itself and waited for the world to pass away. The Glass Egg was likely the remnant of the Chronostatic Sphere's outer shell. Whether time had stopped within this shell, or whether the shell was in a state of chronostasis itself, was a subject better left alone.

The Glass Egg was quiet when Shinji, Trois, and Azuchi stepped inside, even though its walls should have reflected and amplified the

faintest sound. The scent of water washed over the three of them as they passed the cheaply constructed ventilation ducts. The only sound they could hear was the faint electrical notes of the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

"Wow."

In a corner of the main deck, an artificial creek flowed through a proportionately small vegetable garden. A moss-covered, straw-hat-wearing Type-N robot stood in the middle, watering watermelons, its deteriorated joints creaking. It had the air of a middle-aged farmer and was the source of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." The robot briefly stopped singing when Shinji and the others approached to confirm their identities. It was no longer afraid of Azuchi.

"I was wondering where this one went. This is a Type-N robot, the kind that monitors my brain waves. I guess radio frequencies don't penetrate the Glass Egg."

The watermelon patch had been transported from its previous home in the bed of a dump truck back to the Earth, where it had been restored to its former glory. Rei Six seemed to have carefully replanted the whole thing herself. Kaji's watermelon patch now sat level with the deck Shinji and the rest were standing on.

This thing was all over the place when I was in charge.

Shinji had moved the patch from its original home in the Geofront. He'd scooped it out of the ground with Eva-01's hands after the Battle at Nerv HQ had rendered the old location off-limits.

"Six is a lot smarter than I am."

Shinji squatted to look at the garden. It was so green that it seemed like a movie set. The watermelons had been jade marbles the last time he saw them. Six had nurtured them into large emerald globes. They were not the only fruits in the patch; there were other plants now, though they'd yet to reach their full size. Ayanami Rei Six had made her own little biosphere in this place the adults had abandoned.

"This is great." Shinji said under his breath.

"This patch might survive the destruction of Tokyo-3—maybe even the whole world… Though I guess there would be no point, then."

"There must be. Asuka protected this garden before Six came around."

Tomorrow, Shinji would have to bring Trois up to orbit to deliver her to Eva-0.0. The atmosphere had been home to the three Ayanami Rei clones—Quatre, Cinq, and Six. These Ayanamis had lived in a dreamlike state, sharing the soul of Rei Trois on Earth. The girls had mirrored each other…until Armaros came along.

When the black giant had come into contact with Rei Quatre, the three formerly dormant Ayanamis had begun asserting their self-awareness. It was a cruel irony that the four Reis had lost the ability to agree with each other once all of them were sentient. One of them surrendered herself to her initial wave of emotions and went turncoat, while another died protecting her clumsy ideals.

Earthbound Rei Trois would now have to go up into space to look for the missing Rei Six, the last remaining Ayanami with whom she had had a mental link. Her post would likely be permanent. She might never return to the Earth.

Still looking at the soil, Shinji asked her, “Are you sure you’ll be all right? I figured you wouldn’t like going up to space.”

“I have…decided to be with you forever.”

“F-forever?!”

“Being so close to you, to the Q.R. Signum powering the Super Eva, being able to protect your heart that’s so far away… How should I put this… It makes me happy.”

The statement startled Shinji. It sounded a lot like what he himself had said three years ago.

“Everyone has somewhere they belong…” Shinji began, but Trois held her hand up as if to say, “Wait.”

“I wouldn’t mind fading away inside of you, if that’s what my role requires. But—”

Trois’ change of heart caused Shinji to straighten.

“I want to talk to my remaining selves about my formerly dormant emotions. It’s the only way to learn about them after the denial of my mental mirroring.”

Quatre had been the first to reject Trois.

“I’ve joined with Quatre, the me who is ruled by fear, and received Cinq, the me who compromises, from Asuka. All I need now is

to meet Six, the me who is innocent, again. That is why I must find her."

Trois was looking for the fragments of her soul, putting a literal meaning to the idea of "soul-searching".

"This might be the first time you've ever wanted to do something for yourself."

"False," Trois said with a slight smile. "I have to become a visible color before I start looking for my own color."

That was a promise of things to come.

Chapter 2:
Urgent

THE GREAT BOW Azumaterasu had a sharp lower limb that allowed it to be driven into the earth while being held. But it also caused problems in Cage Two, because Super Eva had difficulty gripping it due to its height.

<<Lower the Azumaterasu's stand by eighteen meters,>> instructed Chief Scientist Ibuki Maya from the control booth.

Shinji watched as the grip lowered to Super Eva's shoulder height.

<<This is as compact as we can make it,>> Maya said, even though the recently excavated weapon still towered over Super Eva.

"I guess I can hold it if I have to, but…" Shinji knew the bow would be too big to carry around. Azumaterasu was as large as two Neyarl energy cannons.

"What if I just bring this part of it?"

<<The limbs aren't ordinary frames.>>

Super Eva flexed his muscles as he began lifting the great bow. Shinji succeeded in pulling Azumaterasu out of its stand. He aimed it at the sky, exposed through the opening in Cage Two's ceiling.

"…"

I needed my heart, a window to another dimension, to use the Neyarl guided cannon. I wonder if it'll respond if I call on it again…

Shinji's stolen heart was currently beating in the chest of Torwächter B.

Let's not do that here.

Shinji doubted he could connect with his heart in a non-emergency situation. He returned Azumaterasu to its stand, letting his speculations remain.

<<Well?>> Maya asked with a hint of expectation.

"Well…if I'm being honest, just holding it gives me bad vibes…"

Maya wrinkled her eyebrows. <<And when did you become so

flippant? > >

“I mean, my electrical systems got fried recently, and there was that time I had to fight for my life for way longer than was comfortable. It’s been one crazy thing after another.”

< <I can’t argue with you there… > >

Toji dashed into the cage. “All right, you two, it’s time to put away your toys!”

< <We’re not playing! > >

< <The Azumaterasu isn’t a toy! > >

Shinji and Maya shouted through Super Eva and the speakers of the command booth. Toji plugged his ears and ignored their complaints.

< <We’re launching Trois into orbit soon. The reactivation of Eva-0.0— > >

Should have been tomorrow. The change in plans startled Shinji, and he opened the hatch of his entry plug.

“Wait, what’s going on?”

Toji pointed to the floor. “A trip to the moon’s no walk in the park. I don’t think we’ll get a chance to investigate the thing below us if we don’t do it now.”

Chapter 3:
The Throes of a New World

THE MOON HAD ABSORBED massive amounts of matter from the Earth and had swelled immensely. The gargantuan satellite had also absorbed heat from the tiny blue planet, which had resulted in violent meltdowns within its core. Magma burst all over the surface of the moon as its crust fissured, producing crevices large enough to be seen from the Earth.

The stolen material wasn't just boiling over but causing impossible alchemical changes across the moon—changes that were only visible on the X-ray spectrum. Less subtle, although more violent, metamorphoses were occurring on the dark side.

Another eruption, one so large it seemed like it might split the moon in two, rocked the surface, and twelve hundred kilometers of crust exploded into the air. Most of it crumbled and crashed back down, but a huge chunk of basalt bedrock, four hundred kilometers in diameter, rode the force of the eruption and took to the sky.

The moon's orbit had changed significantly since its rapid expansion and advancement toward Earth. Now, the seismic activity further distorted it. The chunk of bedrock was flung aside just as it was about to break the Roche limit. As the rock's descent accelerated from this gravitational slingshot, observers on Earth finally noticed that violent explosions were shooting chunks of the moon's crust into the sky.

Volcanic gases from the dark side of the moon began flowing over to the near side. The volcanic activity had already been noted by government institutions and amateur astronomers, but none of them could have predicted what happened next.

The hunk of bedrock hurtled toward the Earth, propelled by the gravitational slingshot. If the moon had still been distant, the massive rock would have eventually fallen back to its surface. But the Earth and moon were now only 150,000 kilometers apart. As such, the rock was now on a collision course.

Chapter 4:
Lost Compass

SIX HEARD THE CRIES of countless, flocking birds—or at least, she thought she did.

"So, that's where they've gone," she muttered in her sleep before coming to her senses. "Wha…?"

Six awoke to the glare of the emergency light within her plug. Her Type-N robot had changed its treads into suction cups and was currently hanging upside down from the ceiling. Its feet made popping noises as it traversed the plug.

"Uhhh…"

What on earth happened? Six wondered.

The Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was supposed to participate in the operation at Novaya Zemlya. She would enter sub-orbital flight in Hokkaido using the Eva's graviton floaters. Her jumbled memories began piecing themselves together, and she frowned when she remembered how the black giant had interfered with her plans. She pouted, flapping her arms like a certain penguin.

"M-M-Marmaros!!!"

It was actually spelled "Armaros," but Six continued to growl her version of the name in spite of the black giant's official designation. Armaros had taken over her mind just as she was about to enter orbit and had overridden Eva-00's autonomous navigation commands.

The Eva-00 Type-F, the one-legged giant whose arm and leg had been converted to equip the Angel's Backbone, had received Eva-02's Allegorica treatment and now looked like a Pegasus. It ignored its orbital trajectory and flew higher into the sky, as if drunk on its newly regained freedom of movement.

Thanks to her rushed deployment, however, technical difficulties with her equipment eventually stopped this insane Icarus from spiraling straight into the sun.

The power cascade on the left floater jerked the gravitons, which had been neatly lined up like eggs in a carton, out of place. The right

floater soon followed and stopped operation before the Eva could go into a tailspin. With the floaters offline, the N_2 reactor's output immediately dropped to idling levels, preventing Eva-00 from spinning out of control while simultaneously disabling all internal electronics. The Eva had been in a state of emergency hibernation ever since.

"That jerk!" Six flailed her arms again. The sudden movement made her woozy, forcing her to calm herself.

All of the VR displays in her plug were down. The only thing she could see was the emergency light inside the tube. The only thing she could hear was the circulating LCL…and the sucking noise of the Type-N robot's feet.

The glorified rice cooker popped over to Six's side and chimed like a shameless doorbell. A message shone over the liquid crystal display on its head.

<<You have 148,012 messages.>>

All of which were from Nerv Japan. She couldn't make out most of them because of weak reception, but the general thrust of the messages was, "Please call home."

Transponders and telemetry had been disabled, along with the rest of the communication systems, but the receiving party's high-sensitivity receivers were still working, at least. The last calls to the prodigal Ayanami had been made a few hours ago.

"I'm hungry…"

Six took a pink tube of jelly from the container next to her seat. These were emergency rations for LCL consumption.

It doesn't have calcium, because this wasn't supposed to be a space expedition, but it'll do.

She could sense that she was in orbit. Six had used to pilot the Eva-0.0, an Eva with an exterior S^2 Engine that allowed it to operate in outer space. Her experience helped her to remain calm.

"Let's see…"

Six ordered the auxiliary A.I. to run a full-system diagnostic before restarting Eva-00's N_2 reactor. She got bored halfway through the process, however, and proceeded to peer outside her Eva with its external cameras. An image of her surroundings appeared on a small sub-display in her plug.

“I’m on the moon,” Six mused. The moon was badly burned, and fragments of it were floating like clouds above the surface, but there was no mistaking it. She switched to another camera to get a better view, and that’s when her problems began.

Six sat up with a start and canceled all remaining diagnostic processes. She reactivated the main A.I. and reactor to quick-start the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica. The VR displays in her plug activated, indicating that it was functioning normally. After running a few more checks, the screens shifted, displaying the starry sky around her.

Six barely gave the celestial scene any attention. She looked about frantically in the LCL, her aqua-colored hair waving, before sinking back into her seat.

“The Earth… It’s gone…”

The only thing she saw was the scorched dark side of the moon.

Chapter 5:
Super Eva Lifts Off

HOLDING AN ENTRY PLUG in his Eva's hand brought back bad memories for Shinji. Maya and her engineers had told him they could fix the plug to an exterior rail on his elbow, but what if he knocked into something along the way? While the entry plug could probably withstand the damage, the same couldn't be said for its contents. Besides, valuables should always be part of one's carry-on.

"I won't crush you, Trois. I promise."

<<I know you won't.>>

An image of Trois popped up in a small window of his sub-display. She looked calm enough. This was the third time they'd had this conversation, after all.

With a container full of supplies attached to his exterior rail, Super Eva flew slowly until he reached the point where the atmosphere was thinner. He activated his Vertex wings' field deflector and kicked off. He accelerated horizontally through the sky, making the first pass of a long and circular flight path.

"I just think you should've been inside Super Eva."

<<We can't have that,>> Trois said, sounding a lot like Misato. <<You've never been to outer space, have you? You have to treat this as a learning experience.>>

"Sure, but this is one hell of a curve…"

<<Why? There are no enemies around.>>

The Earth was now as small as it was battered. A mantle of gray sulfurous gases covered the planet, making it no longer resemble a sapphire.

<<What I mean to say is, look at our planet. Everyone says it's beautiful, but I've never understood why.>>

"Oh, hmm…" Shinji said.

<<Ikari-kun?>>

"Over there. That's the most beautiful sight so far…" Shinji said

dreamily.

On her sub-display, Trois saw that Shinji was looking slightly up, instead of directly at her.

“Where?”

< <The borderline.> >

Trois’ plug had been outfitted specifically for space operations, and its sensors were currently synced up with Super Eva’s virtual display so she could better cover Shinji. They were looking at the same image.

“The borderline?” Trois looked up, too.

< <It’s that spot where the horizon meets outer space. The spot where the bright blue Earth transitions into deep blue…and the pitch black right outside it.> >

The sight had gained a special significance for Trois when she’d seen it through the eyes of Quatre, Cinq, and Six, day in and day out. In those days, she would scan the horizon for enemies and potential escape routes.

< <That shade of blue…is just like your hair.> >

“…” Trois didn’t understand. But she felt like a sudden change had taken place inside her. This place was going to take on a new significance, though she didn’t know why yet.

Her telescope finally picked up the long-abandoned Eva-0.0 over the ultramarine ridgeline. They would arrive at their destination with a few more circular passes.

From today forth, Eva-0.0 would be Rei Trois’ unit.

Chapter 6:
Uninvited Guest

SIX'S EVA-00 TYPE-F ALLEGORICA had been broadcasting its signature once every thirty minutes, like a lost child shouting for its parents. Six sent her signal in all directions, since she couldn't tell where the Earth was. They couldn't travel very far and had a low chance of being recognized even if they were received.

It was possible that the Earth lay on the other side of the moon. But given the time of day and the activation logs of her graviton floaters, and taking into account the moon's irregular orbit and size, Six had not been knocked all the way to the dark side.

Formerly, the moon's rotation was so slow as to virtually guarantee a view of the Earth no matter what time it was. Now, the moon rotated faster than a cat could dart its eyes.

Six gave up on trying to orient herself and instead began calculating the Earth's coordinates. There were bound to be discrepancies, of course. Although the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was kitted out similarly to the Eva-02 Allegorica, its observation equipment and navigation systems weren't made for space operations.

Rei Six was beginning to fear she'd been shipwrecked in space.

Beep-beep! The Type-N robot chirped cheerfully to her. *Beep-beep!*

Six ignored it and continued her calculations.

Beep-beep! Beep-beep! Beep-beep!

Beep-beep! Beep-beep! Beep-beep-beep!

"Shut up!" Six yelled at the little rice cooker and banged the controls.

The robot's liquid crystal display lit up. < <Excuse me?> >

"Huh?!"

The voice didn't belong to Six's Type-N robot, that was for sure. The plug's internal mechanisms fired up again, and the sound migrated from the robot to the console's hydrospeaker. She didn't want the sound to override any important incoming transmissions. Six didn't

immediately realize that the call was coming from outside. She looked to the corner of her sub-display, where a robot's ID code and transmission coordinates had appeared, telling her that the message was coming from a different robot…the one formerly belonging to Rei Cinq. This was the same robot that had gone missing some time ago.

"No way!"

Six could be excused for her surprise. The last time she'd seen this particular Type-N bot was back in Shinji's watermelon patch. Crimson A1, the Asuka/Eva synthesis, had flung it into outer space. Its signal was weak and barely reached her even with the reduced atmosphere, but it was there. This robot had responded to Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's calls to Hakone.

The Type-N's trajectory was closing in on them, but it showed no signs of stopping once it got there. Six's display showed that the robot was currently 5,600 kilometers away from them and moving at a speed of thirty kilometers per second. A significant distance on a planetary scale, but considering the robot could have been lost in any part of space, it was nothing short of miraculous that they were practically rubbing shoulders.

"Why does its trajectory curve slightly every time I send a signal?"

Six reactivated the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's graviton floaters without a hitch. Reaching the Type-N wasn't her only goal. She would use her gravitons to pinpoint nearby heavenly bodies to help her triangulate the Earth's location…assuming there *was* still an Earth on the other side of the moon. Six launched herself, resolving to retrieve her rice-cooker-shaped friend.

Chapter 7:
Reactivating Eva-0.0

SHINJI'S CHAIN OF CRAZY EVENTS continued. Eva-0.0, the Eva equipped with the powerful gamma-ray laser cannon, lay dormant at an altitude of 1600 kilometers. Its external, rear-mounted S^2 Engine was in a state of hibernation. Like Angels, Evangelions usually self-destructed within a few hours in the event of a total system failure, but the engine hummed gently, indicating that it could still act as a power supply. Restarting would be a cinch.

Eva-0.0 was looking pretty good, all things considered, and that was including the slight damage to its satellite dish from a stray meteor. Trois quickly prepared for the plug insertion, despite Shinji's insistence that they should do a more thorough check of the unit's exterior.

"What if something like Bardiel got inside it?"

<<Highly unlikely, at least as far as Bardiel itself is concerned.>>

"How come?"

Rei Trois paused before elaborating. <<You've fought particular Angels multiple times over the course of this whole ordeal, but have you ever come across multiple copies at once? Angel Carriers aside, have you ever fought two Sachiels in one encounter?>>

Huh. Never thought of that before.

"I don't think so…but I wonder why not. We know they can keep making copies of themselves…"

<<Suppose they were never copies… Suppose we've been fighting the same individual Angels this whole time. They probably need to die before they can be brought back. That's how the world works. That's why my existence is an anomaly.>>

"Don't say that."

<<I use the word in its technical sense, not to wallow in self-pity. Strange as I am, I still wish to understand myself. In any case, that's why I don't think Bardiel is here.>>

Shinji remembered the metal cylinder in his hands.

"It can't come back, because it's not really gone. It's still a part of Toji's shadow… Is that what you're saying?"

<<Yes. A mere hypothesis, of course.>>

I wonder who she's mimicking now.

"Sounds like a straight-up ghost story…" Shinji mused, though he understood her logic. If anything, humans were a bigger threat to Eva-0.0 than Angels. There had been multiple instances of the Eva being hit with large compression signals, though Nerv Japan could never figure out which country, or what machine, had produced them.

<<Resuming communications. Hakone to Super Eva, do you copy?>> Misato said through the comm link.

Eva-0.0 floated at an altitude of 1600 kilometers. Reaching it had been estimated to take a good 120 minutes, during which time Super Eva would be unable to establish contact with any of the available satellites. Seventy minutes was the blackout period for communication with Hakone.

<<You're not inside yet? Hurry up! We don't have time to lose. Or do you still need to say your goodbyes?>>

What is this woman's problem? I swear…

<<I want you to run this new simulation software by the end of our next blackout period. Can you do that?>>

"Super Eva to Hakone, we'll try. Trois?"

<<Cutting off Super Eva's power supply to the plug. All prepped for insertion. Proceed, Ikari-kun.>>

The external power cable connecting the gamma-ray laser cannon to Eva-0.0 was disconnected before Shinji could insert the entry plug containing Trois. Misato reassured him as he hesitated over the next step.

<<Just like we planned, Shinji-kun.>>

"Copy that."

Super Eva began to shift and reposition himself. He fired up his Vertex wings to stabilize his lower body, then removed the Powered 8 railgun from his shoulder pylon, loaded it with a twelve-round magazine, and aimed it at Eva-0.0…just in case the unit decided to go

berserk. The seemingly docile S² Engine on the Eva's back had consumed Cinq, after all.

"Super Eva, ready to proceed."

<<This is Hakone command. Monitors online.>>

Trois had been waiting for those words.

<<Initiating reactivation sequence of S² Engine.>>

The external unit on Eva-0.0's back began emitting a green glow.

<<This is Hakone command. Unit Zero has entered normal power levels.>>

<<Initiating S² Engine.>>

The light glowed brighter and brighter.

<<This is Hakone command. Ignition power of Unit Zero has peaked. You are clear to reactivate.>>

<<Activating Evangelion Unit-0.0.>>

The Evangelion's body stirred as it awakened from its sleep. Excess ignition power was converted into infrared rays, which were released by the S² Engine's blowoff valve.

Trois slowly stretched Eva-0.0's arms and legs to loosen it from its long slumber and rebalance its center of gravity. The orange giant moved sluggishly.

Thirty seconds passed after reactivation. "This is Shinji. No anomalies at T plus thirty."

Sixty seconds passed after reactivation. <<This is Hakone command. No anomalies at T plus sixty.>>

Trois took deep breaths in the flowing LCL as she listened to the low growl of the S² Engine. Her entry plug was a new model, but she'd learn its quirks by simply breathing as the reactivation process continued.

"This is Six's Eva… We're going to find your master now. Before the storm rolls in."

Just then, a huge chunk of the moon exploded, sending shock waves rippling through the nearby space.

Misato had replaced Toji and resumed her position as commander of Nerv Japan. At the battle of Novaya Zemlya, Asuka/Eva had gained the Torwächter designation when she was seen aiding the enemy. Consequently, her previous designation of A1 was changed to Torwächter A1. The commander of Nerv Japan had taken the brunt of the blame, but the UN Security Council's hearing had to be postponed because of the moon rock emergency.

Misato sighed. She stretched in her seat as she watched the display.

"What's wrong?" asked Fuyutsuki.

"It just feels like we've used up all our pieces."

Every one of Nerv Japan's Evas had been wounded. Some had turned to the enemy's side, while others had been outright destroyed.

With the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica missing, Super Eva was the only functional unit they had. The lone Eva-0.0 in orbit was in pristine condition. With that unit's reactivation, Nerv Japan would finally run out of reserve Evangelions and reserve pilots.

"If all goes well, this is the last time we'll need them."

The work went smoothly, despite Super Eva almost getting lost in space three times. Eva-0.0 was resupplied, rearmed, and updated as best as it could have been.

Hyuga's voice came over the intercom. <<This is Hakone command to Shinji. Return with Super Eva once four simulation runs come up green.>>

"Copy that."

Super Eva's eyes were locked on to the terrible engine on Eva-0.0's back, waiting for the slightest anomaly to occur.

The giant moon rock kicked up massive sandstorms, obscuring its trajectory from observers. As it was, the gargantuan mass looked as if someone had taken a picture of the underside of a landslide.

It's not safe to be here, especially by yourself.

A wave of conflicting emotions rushed through Shinji as the time to part with Trois crept closer.

<<I'm starting up, Ikari-kun.>>

With a blow of the reaction control system, Trois flipped Eva-0.0 upside down. Her head and shoulders usually faced the Earth, but tonight, they pointed to the stars.

The timer to Shinji's return trip began counting down.

"Be seeing you," Shinji said, accelerating away. The two giants were finally separating.

<<Thank you for keeping your promise, Ikari-kun.>>

"Promise…? You mean about finding a color? Wait, when did that happen?"

Eva-0.0 pointed to the round horizon of Earth under her parasol.

<<You gave me the color of the end of the sky and the beginning of the Earth.>>

But that was just an opinion…

"I don't think that's good enough to be a color that suits you. It needs to be more… You know."

<<No. This is my color now.>>

Chapter 8:
Second Joker in a Deck

LITTLE REI SIX'S Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was changing course despite being in a state of high acceleration. Her back was pressed to her seat, the plugsuit locked in to withstand the heavy load. The reverse acceleration would end soon.

Eva-0.0 was facing her objective now. She used the lidar of the Angel's Backbone firing system to do a sweep for the Type-N robot and make sure they were on the same vector. Six was projecting her A.T. Field to catch her little friend when suddenly—

BEEP!

Alarms went off in her plug. Having finished its analysis, her A.I. informed her of the object's true identity.

< <Object has an eighty-three percent chance of being designated Relic One or One Dash. Indicators have been changed accordingly.> >

"You're kidding!"

Laser scans indicated that the thing she'd previously thought to be a Type-N robot was actually one of the most dangerous objects in the universe.

I'd know that shape anywhere! What now?!

Six magnified the density of her A.T. Field and then set her graviton floaters to maximum output before rushing straight for the advancing relic.

She abruptly cut power to both systems. The lance relied on Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's A.T. Field to hone in on its core; without that field, Six would be able to manually dodge it. In the darkness of her plug, lit only by her sub-display, she vented gas to evade the lance.

The relic whizzed right past her, but it was going so fast that it somehow produced a sonic boom in the silent vacuum. She caught a glimpse of its shaft as sunlight reflected off the red spear.

"The Lance of Longinus! But which one?"

This was the copy produced by Seele.

Designated Relic One Dash, it had been stolen by the Leliel Carrier and found by Shinji on the Apple's Core, the site of the Human Instrumentality Project's initial test. Super Eva had then proceeded to throw toward Earth. The lance had returned to lunar orbit after crossing the vastness of space.

The lance sped by Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica at blinding speeds but then returned to its original course.

"What is it doing here? I have to go after it."

Eva-0.0 rushed into position to give chase.

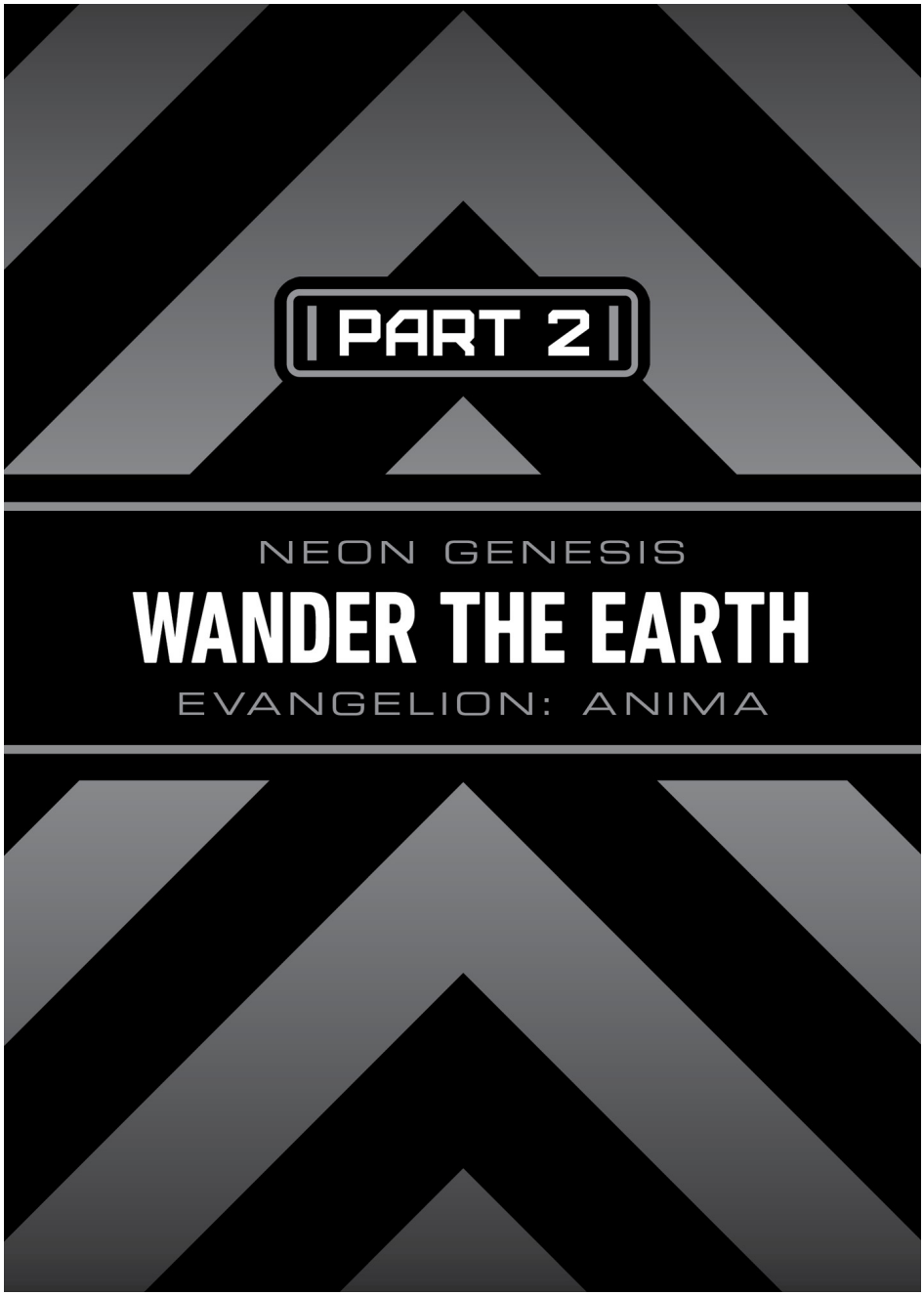
When Shinji had prepared to throw the lance into the sky, Rei Quatre—who was then also on board Super Eva—had calculated the longest trajectory it could take to Earth. Given that the Apple's Core was a distant planet on the far side of the sun, the lance had moved ridiculously fast.

Six didn't know what the lance had been through and could only stare, mouth agape. The original Lance of Longinus had become the Ring of Longinus that constricted the Earth. It had extended itself until it finally came down from the atmosphere to pierce Super Eva's heart. Six had heard it was tens of thousands of kilometers long by then.

She accelerated Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica after the lance and was disheartened when she saw it cross the moon's horizon.

"Huh?"

Eva-0.0's high speed camera caught something. Six zoomed in on the lance's tail and spotted a rice cooker caught between its bloated helixes. A Type-N robot was hanging on for dear life.


PART 2
NEON GENESIS
WANDER THE EARTH
EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 9:
Stray Beast

HAVING GONE ROGUE at the end of the Novaya Zemlya operation, the U.S. Evangelion, Wolfpack, had reached the northern coast of Norway after swimming across the Barents Sea. There were reports of the quadrupedal giant breaking land on the beaches of Norway, but the military and local authorities could do little about it. By the time they found out, Wolfpack had already fled into the forest, heeding its primal instincts.

Mari, its pilot, didn't seem to have a goal in mind—but she did. She was on the prowl.

The U.S. Evangelion had been created by splicing its pilot's genes with those of multiple animals. The A.T. Field surrounding it contained remnants of the beasts' souls. Despite Mari's inexplicable statements about herself and the Eva, she'd never failed to comply with her orders.

Or at least, not until she found her ideal. Once she did, she'd ignored Nerv U.S.'s command to withdraw and gone rogue.

Mari was hunting for the Asuka/Eva synthesis, current designation Torwächter A1. Asuka had encountered the Ark on the moon, where the data of all organic life existing from the beginning of time had flowed through her.

Data and matter were equivalent to each other on the Ark, and Eva-02 had synthesized with its pilot to prevent Asuka's organic data from being overwritten. Most of the organic data had been spent in North Africa, and Asuka/Eva had managed to retain her amalgamated form. However, a mass of individual information continued to swirl inside her, dormant.

To Mari, this was the ideal self. She would stop at nothing to find her role model and quarry.

Wolfpack was surrounded by over twenty atmospheric distortions.

Mari and her Eva, Wolfpack, were Nerv U.S.'s answer to Nerv Japan's rigorously high sync rate requirements. The idea of splicing

animal and human genomes together to allow for lower sync rates was an ambitious one, although officially their scientists swore that no animal souls were harmed during the production of Wolfpack. In fact, they maintained that Mari's unsettling references to her "pack" were all in her head. She disagreed, of course. She and her shadows were as real, and as dangerous, as wolves.

Mari had been looking for a way to live in peace with her pack. She sensed that Asuka would know how after surviving the onslaught of organic data.

"Hrr," Mari growled. Her pupils had become feline slits.

BEEP!

Her console somehow understood her command and displayed a window containing a special task. Voice commands no longer worked with Mari, but mental commands did. The cursor flickered, waiting for her to phase in.

The emergency program imitated Super Eva's heartbeats by using N_2 ignitions. Its primary function was to summon humanity's enemies, the Angel Carriers and Torwächters. How convenient for her that Asuka/Eva was now also a Torwächter.

Chapter 10:
Where Memories Lie

THE TWO TORWÄCHTERS showed up unannounced in a small hamlet on the Euro-German mountain range near the Rhine.

Torwächter B, the one in possession of Shinji's heart, stood still on the outskirts of town where it had first appeared. The giant looked like an empty suit of armor, fully recovered from the battle of Novaya Zemlya. The dissection marks the battle had left were barely discernible.

THRUM!

Though Torwächter B stood perfectly still, its pulse still echoed menacingly.

Asuka/Eva—Torwächter A1—on the other hand, had begun infiltrating the small town.

The Euro Eva, Heurtebise, was currently undergoing repairs to deal with the damage it had suffered at Novaya Zemlya. Its engineers were also using the opportunity to equip it with tech that would hopefully take care of the giant moon rock on a collision course with Earth. Suffice it to say, Heurtebise's pilot wasn't with the Evangelion right now. She was at the feet of the sneaking Torwächter.

Her escorts wasted no time warning her and immediately started to extract her from the dangerous situation. "Wait!" Hikari said. She held a bouquet of flowers in her hand and had made up her mind to deliver it.

"I think she… Asuka wants to see her, too."

Hikari was in town to visit a certain individual who was hospitalized there.

Torwächter A1 raised her sharp heel to keep walking.

You'll step on someone!

She stopped as soon as she remembered those words. Shinji had said something similar at some point.

The dark red giant carefully navigated around the cars and buildings, walking much slower now to avoid causing damage.

But try as she might, the gigantic, multi-thousand-ton humanoid could only be so careful. The plate hanging from its back left the ground in a state of utter chaos. While Asuka/Eva didn't move with quite enough force to leave a trench wherever she went, the plate still acted like a broom, sweeping objects away like dust. The ground shook, the streets were littered with rubble, the power lines were cut, and the trees were felled.

Two Tornados equipped with penetrator charges had been dispatched after the appearance of the Torwächters and were currently circling the small mountain town, though they showed no signs of attacking. Protocol bound them to observe before using artillery, and the pilots had resolved to keep what little order there was left.

Besides, Horaki Hikari was down at the Torwächter's feet.

The Japanese high school girl was Heurtebise's only pilot and Europe's only Evangelion pilot. Losing her would permanently impair their firepower.

She was the one who'd asked them not to lay a hand on Asuka/Eva.

"Weird enough she's choosing to stay, but why does she insist on not evacuating the rest of the area?"

The fighter pilots had reason to worry. A skirmish here could produce a second Novaya Zemlya, which, considering the state of the world, might spell the end of the European continent.

Asuka's mother was asleep.

There had been fluctuations in her brain waves several hours ago, but she was equipped with implants that created a calming environment. Her body rejected drugs after being exposed to them for too long, and now her brain had to be maintained by nanomachines working through an exterior electromagnetic network. Her doctors told Hikari that she was not to be disturbed until they could figure out the cause of the fluctuations, which happened in the shallows of her memory's neural network.

"That's all right," Hikari said.

She proceeded to wheel the smartbed Asuka's mother lay upon into an elevator. Their destination was the roof.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, ma'am. Asuka's with me today. We're here to see you."

Hikari had requested the facility's administrators let the Asuka/Eva synthesis see her mother. They'd been reluctant at first, but she added, "If you don't let her see her mother, she might destroy this place while looking for her."

The administrators had relented.

The mountain town wasn't just a scenic healthcare facility. It was, in fact, one of Europe's Evangelion research facilities. It also acted as a holding area for failed pilot candidates. Those who weren't chosen by Heurtebise would spend the rest of their lives here under strict observation. The town also held individuals who possessed highly sensitive information.

But even if Asuka's mother were to wake now, she wouldn't recognize her own daughter.

Hikari thought it was a cruel irony. The vestiges of her consciousness in Eva-02 had asked Hikari to take care of her daughter in North Africa. The same entity was probably what had protected her on the moon and had desperately tried to save her by forming the Asuka/Eva synthesis.

That kind of herculean effort would tear anyone to pieces.

What was left of Asuka's mother had melted into her daughter's Eva. Hikari doubted whether the soul of this pale woman with sunken cheeks would ever come back to her body.

The door opened. They were greeted by the sound of Torwächter B's beating heart and the melody of A1's graviton floaters. Hikari's eyes adjusted to the sunlight, and she saw that the glistening red-and-black body of Torwächter A1 cast a shadow over the rooftop.

"At least the patient's out of direct sunlight."

Hikari took the lead, as the rest of the facility's personnel showed no intention of leaving the safety of the elevator. She pushed the stick of the smartbed forward and walked toward Asuka.

Asuka remained still.

“Is she…hesitating?”

Hikari gave it some thought before answering. “I think she’s surprised at how small her mother seems… Being in an Evangelion has that effect on people.”

“Is that really so surprising?”

“Yes, actually. Especially when you’re used to seeing that person loom over you…”

Hikari remembered how Toji had looked in the cockpit of the N_2 Flanker.

There was a rumbling noise as Asuka/Eva contracted her muscles. She extended her arm, which made everyone present save Hikari flinch and take a step back. Hikari stood stalwart next to the smartbed and looked the giant straight in the eye. She hovered her middle and index fingers over the bed to signal what her friend should be doing.

“Hey, Asuka.” Hikari didn’t know whether the Asuka/Eva synthesis had heard her, but the red giant had cast the shadow of her finger over her sleeping mother.

“I’m sorry for yelling at you about Toji. I know you were trying to save him. Thank you.”

The way you are now, I wonder if you have any reason left to fight…

“Ritter, the patient!”

One of the personnel noticed the change. Though Asuka’s mother was still asleep, her frozen expression was slowly melting into a smile.

“—!”

The things that existed outside her closed eyelids were the stuff of nightmares. A red giant with black streaks gazed upon her, its red arm covering the sky like a bridge to another world, from which there would be no return.

Did the smile of Asuka’s mother call to the portion of her daughter that still lay inside the Asuka/Eva synthesis?

Or maybe…

Maybe one could understand the situation better through closed eyes.

Suddenly, the air around Asuka/Eva changed. She jerked up and

looked north.

"Torwächter B on the move!"

The black giant in possession of Shinji's heart stood still, though its head also faced north.

The two Torwächters turned their bodies and started walking. They faded like mist and sank into the ground with every step as they opened a dimensional portal under their feet. They walked into the earth as if it were water. First it came up to their waists, then their chests, and eventually even their horns disappeared below ground.

"Asuka's been called away… But by who?"

THRUM!

Super Eva's heartbeat pulsed in the forest of the northern coast.

Mari wasn't surprised by the appearance of the Torwächters, since she was the one who'd summoned them.

The trees here had turned white, perhaps from a swarm of locusts or extreme climate change. Wolfpack cleared a path through the withered woods to where the black messengers had appeared.

Is that B I see? Looks like he's fully recovered. And here I thought I could finish him off while he was damaged!

Wolfpack kicked the ground and leaped at the black giant with reckless abandon.

Torwächters A1 and B summoned their Angel Carriers. With a two-on-one situation, the fight was already in their favor, but the Carriers widened the gap in their firepower. Even Wolfpack couldn't kill them instantly.

The two Torwächters had had their back plates pressed against each other when Wolfpack attacked. The two giants split apart, opening a pitch-black dimensional window between them.

Wolfpack had no choice but to charge right through the window.

The Torwächter on the left was partially red. Mari turned to it and shouted, "Asuka!" but it was too late.

Wolfpack fell into the Torwächters' trap.

Mari felt that she had been released from her chains, only to lose

her freedom.

Where is this? Where am I?!

The Torwächters' ability to open dimensional windows was common knowledge by now.

Doesn't matter, I guess.

Wolfpack was launched into the air. It extended its claws to latch on to a nearby slab of rock, but it missed.

What is going on? Her gyroscope couldn't detect which way was up. Wolfpack turned its body in midair but failed to kill its own momentum. Its lower body slammed into the ground and rebounded across the large boulder.

Are we still in free fall?! Is the rock surface falling, too?!

Mari felt her otolith rise in her semicircular canals. She and Wolfpack were falling all right.

Her virtual display shifted from the slab to a darker expanse.

"What?!"

Alarms blared as her environmental sensors picked up the sudden change in her surroundings, and she finally noticed the jump in her electromagnetic radiation shields. External air intake was completely sealed off, which meant that the parts of her equipment that relied on radiator cooling were automatically shut down.

The U.S. Eva's body started floating again, but Wolfpack held on to the ground by generating an A.T. Field with its legion of animal souls. Mari extended her claws and finally brought the Eva to a standstill.

She looked beyond the mountainous boulders and spotted the moon nearby, hanging in the jet-black sky.

I'm in space?!

Mari's Wolfpack was currently on the 430-kilometer-wide chunk of moon rock that was falling to Earth.

Before she could process what was going on, she was overwhelmed by a rumble of wings beating right behind her.

What is it now?!

Having barely adjusted to the vacuum of space, Wolfpack was now subjected to a rush of wind.

What the…?!

The giant tumbled forward.

A white mist whipped toward her, and she discovered its true identity. Countless birds, which had disappeared from the face of the Earth, emerged from the mist, casting a dark shadow over her with their outstretched wings.

A hallucination? Mari hoped so, because she couldn't possibly avoid the swarm. Thankfully, they all passed harmlessly through Wolfpack.

She could still feel the wind, though. She turned to her environmental sensors and was shocked to find the barometer showing a solid zero. When the "wind" disappeared, the pitch-black sky and rocky terrain returned in nauseating contrast.

What the hell was that about?!

Mari had no time to dwell on it. She'd have to wait until she caught Torwächters A1 and B and the heartbeat. She leaped out of the window they opened—together with four Angel Carriers.

Chapter 11:
Observer Kaji

NESTLED AWAY in the valley of a distant mountain range was Quatre's mutant Eva-0.0. Its black wings covered the sky.

The inflated moon hung above, its exfoliated crust hypervisible as it advanced on the Earth.

"It's a shame that such a large chunk broke off after it gathered so much mass."

Quatre sighed in Shinji's plugsuit. She looked up at the spectacle in the sky while standing on the mutant Eva-0.0's chest. Behind her, the Kaji-vessel said, "The black giant has been informed," and lit a cigarette. He held the Q.R. Signum lodged in the Eva's chest.

"The other lance is already on its way to Earth. Primarily because you kept your mouth shut. You think you're the only one who knows the replica's trajectory?"

"Huh?" What was he talking about now?

Shinji and Trois had thrown the lance at the Earth from the Apple's Core—a planet on the other side of the sun that had been the testing ground for the Human Instrumentality Project.

Why was Kaji bringing up the lance?

"Allow me to guess what you and Gendo's son were thinking. 'The black giant's messengers require ground to transport themselves. Therefore, sending the lance through outer space, where ground is in short supply, would be the safest route it can take.' And you would normally be correct. But what if I reversed your presuppositions, puppet?"

"Flipped them around?"

"Yes. How do you capture a lance flying through the void of space? Go on. Think about it."

What was the Kaji-vessel asking her? Quatre went through her argument in reverse.

"You would need to teleport yourself to a point in the lance's orbit

before it could reach Earth…but you would need a large amount of ground to do that…"

"Yes, and…?"

The Kaji-vessel grinned as he pressed her. He'd used this grin on many women in his time, suggesting that Seele had not completely overwritten his mind.

As Quatre connected the dots, her face stiffened. *No…*

"You blew up a portion of the moon to get in the lance's way…?!"

Had the sudden change in lunar terrain not been a natural process?

"But…based on its trajectory, it will be a long time before it reaches the Earth!"

"I suppose. But unfortunately, the lance will stop at nothing to reach its target. It will even ignore the laws of physics unless a great obstacle stands in its way. The lance is close to the Earth, which is a testament to its will."

Was Seele/Kaji telling her the truth or only bluffing? Quatre considered the possibilities.

No!

The evidence to back up Kaji's argument appeared in her mind. Quatre experienced a rush of déjà vu through the Ayanamis' defunct mental mirroring. The whole scene of Six sighting the red lance and being blown away by its sonic wave played out in the blink of an eye.

"I am very pleased to see that the lance is still in high spirits. Gendo's son flung it into space, and it traveled 300,000,000 kilometers to the other side of the sun in such a short time."

The Kaji-vessel flicked his cigarette butt into the deep valley. Quatre's displeasure manifested as an A.T. Field that crackled the stub into nothing.

"As for the black messengers, they will take the replica and turn that distant land into an execution site for the degraded beast."

"Come," the Kaji-vessel ordered as he released the black scale with blood flowing through it.

"We'll go there as well. That place still counts as ground, after all. As Seele, we must reclaim the spear that is rightfully ours."

Chapter 12:
Black Fragment

<< The quantum flow indicator's the only thing that picked that up?! >>

"No echoes on the radar and lidar. Clear of emissions and reflections."

But they all felt the small, hazardous object's approach. The search for the orbiting Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was put on hold as they frantically prepared the gamma-ray laser cannon for operation.

As the unit's N_2 reactor kicked into emergency protocol and clanged to life, its pilot, Trois, set her course according to the quantum flow indicator.

"Unit Zero, Trois to command. Adjusting course to avoid impact. Object will be identified after adjustment. Seventy-five percent chance of being a Q.R. Signum."

<<I knew it! This is Hakone to Trois. You're free to fire as long as you don't point that cannon toward Earth. Weapons free! I repeat, weapons free! Blow that thing out of the sky if it tries to take you over like Quatre's Eva! >>

The cannon trigger dropped into position on Toji's command.

An avalanche of population inversions occurred in the cannon's gigantic triple-nuclear excitation unit, producing lasers that converged upon a single point.

The electric field produced a massive, distorted thud as thirty-six thousand capacitors lost their charge all at once.

The cannon fired, though the motion was terribly subdued in outer space. Still, a blinding light spread into the far distance as fragments scattered like shattered glass.

"Signal lost. Q.R. Signum neutralized."

Chapter 13:
Interference

A STRANGE TWIST OF FATE was at play here, as unlikely as winning the lottery multiple times in a row. The Type-N robot, which had joined the stars after the Asuka/Eva synthesis had flicked it into outer space, was caught in the ridges of the Lance of Longinus as it sped toward the moon's orbit.

Six picked up the beeps of its distress signal and gave chase.

When Ayanami Rei Six had woken in the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica, she, too, had been stranded in space. The Lance of Longinus replica had zoomed past her, and she was in the process of accelerating after it. "Ugh… I'm still under the Doppler effect," Six complained about her negative acceleration.

As she kept her eyes fixed on the lance, she noticed that a significantly large hole had opened up in the vacuum of space.

Had that always been there? If so, Six hadn't noticed until now.

Although equipped with powerful thrusters that allowed it to fly into space, Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was still a land unit. The star chart installed in its navigation system was strictly for emergency situations, only detecting the brightest stars and planets to get the unit's bearings. It was cruder than a grade schooler's constellation map. Six would've noticed the stark anomaly upon reboot if she'd been provided with a more detailed system.

A large mask of shadows covered a portion of the stars. Six took a closer look and noticed that its outline was glowing, and it was slowly growing larger.

The large shadow was forming over the dark side of the lunar landmass.

Sirens started blaring in her plug. The moon slab was rushing through the thick dust cloud.

Violent sparks flashed across her A.T. Field. The field functioned similarly to magnetic field lines, and whatever resistance it met was

reduced before being transmitted to Eva-0.0's body. The Eva held up its left hand to withstand the shock waves and bursts of light. When the storm finally settled, and Six could see again, she let out a cheerful whistle.

"Leaping lemurs!" Six said as she saw the blue ring of Earth rise above the lunar horizon.

<<Ayanami Rei Six, is that you?>> said a voice that wasn't a voice. Six recognized it somehow.

"What? Who's talking?"

Quadrupeds have excellent awareness on level ground but are mostly oblivious to whatever happens overhead. Wolfpack was no exception, even with Mari's senses enhanced by her pack.

Wolfpack's sensors were overwhelmed by the amount of dust being kicked up from the slab. The data from its immediate surroundings was too much for it to bear, and the fact that it was also still in mid-escape made for one disoriented Eva.

Six had been so overjoyed at finally spotting Earth that she'd accidentally activated all the switches within her reach. Her firearms were fortunately locked by the FSC reacting to her brainwave patterns, but her communication lines weren't so rigorously protected. Her Eva proceeded to broadcast Six's meaningless declaration across the empty void.

<<Leaping lemurs!>>

Mari turned to look at the sky without glancing at her communications console.

She noticed, with a twitch of the ears atop her head, *I'm not the only one who came through the portal!*

The halo of light that was Ramiel's particle beam wrapped around Wolfpack's waist. The beasts of its A.T. Field shone like lightning and bolted out of the compromising position.

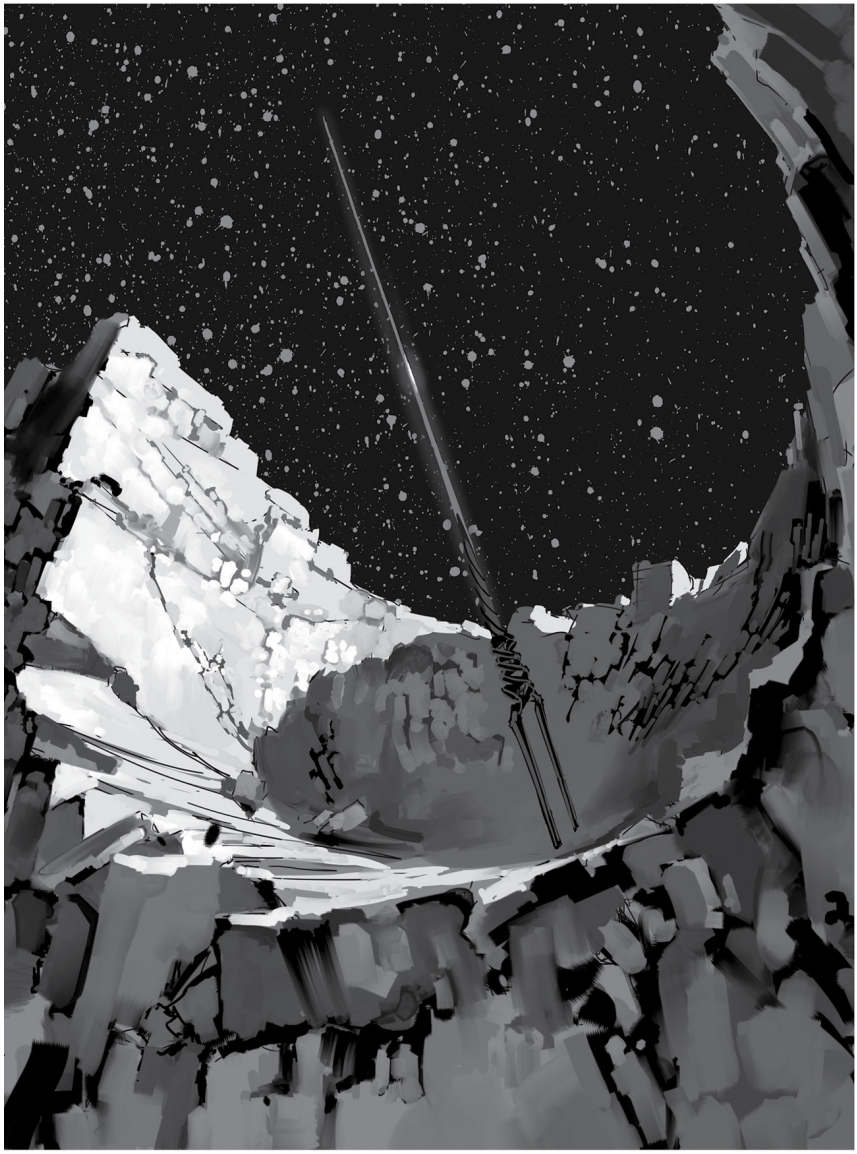
Suddenly, an inverted dust cloud exploded from the slab in the silent vacuum of space.

The replica Lance of Longinus had finally landed.

Its impact produced shock waves over four hundred kilometers

from the epicenter, rendering its immediate vicinity into floating rubble.

The replica Lance of Longinus pierces the detached lunar landmass.



That voice…

< <Ayanami Rei Six, is that you? > > Mari growled this, and yet, for some reason, Six understood her perfectly.

< <What? Who's talking? Cat Ears? > >

The lance stood tall in the center of the crater. Wolfpack proceeded to pull it out of the stone with its powerful jaws.

< <Wolves and a dog… No cats present. > >

Six fired the enhanced Angel's Backbone at the Q.R. Signum of the Carrier who was trying to steal the lance. It shattered into a fireworks display of blood.

< <Cat Ears! It *is* you! > >

Six was ecstatic to hear a familiar voice in the loneliness of space. Mari took the red lance and stabbed the remaining Q.R. Signum of the lurching Carrier.

< <Six, Momo is inside of Wolfpack's transport craft. > >

< <It's pronounced 'cease'! Like in French! Really? No wonder I couldn't find her anywhere. > >

Mari thought that this might be the first time she'd cared for anyone outside her pack.

Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica began decelerating after firing its thrusters in the other direction.

Wolfpack was getting used to the low-gravity environment. It still had three Angel Carriers left to fight, but with the Lance of Longinus in hand…

< <Six, did you throw this lance? > >

< <Nope. I'm just going after it. My friend's stuck to it! > >

< <Your friend? > >

< <Yeah! > >

Mari's monitor robot squeaked in response to the signal coming from the Type-N robot attached to the Lance of Longinus's helix. The Type-N with suction cups for legs also chimed in, and the three robots proceeded to have a high-speed conversation. Mari could almost hear them sigh as they complained about the humans' treatment of their kind.

< <Can you see Asuka from where you're standing? > >

< <You mean Asuka's here? Asukaaaaaa! > >

Six was unaware that the Asuka/Eva synthesis had turned Victor —or Torwächter A1, per the NATO designation. In fact, Torwächter A1 was *also* unaware that she was working for the enemy now, and she waved to Six from behind the Angel Carriers.

< <I see her. Sunrise to the left. Fifteen hundred meters off its rotational axis. I think. > >

That was all Mari needed for Wolfpack to start charging through the swarm of Carriers.

< <Why? What's going on? Are you friends with Asuka? > >

< <I'm here to eat Asuka. > >

Six didn't know what she meant by that. She squinted her eyes and thought about it. Eventually, she said, "I wonder if she'd taste like a habanero—aah!"

Six yelped at the sudden gust of white in the empty vacuum. Birds… Birds as far as the eye could see.

< <Hallucinations. Don't let them fool you. > >

< <I don't think they are! > > snapped Six.

< <Look, there's something behind the moon, and they're all flying there. > >

Six said this on pure intuition. She didn't know what she was pointing to. Back on Hakone, Shinji had said the thing that Trois had hesitated to say: *The stage for the next Earth is the moon.*

The moon was secretly siphoning Earth's materials to expand itself. Yet, despite the Earth's shrinking mass, its seas remained stable, and the water was beginning to encroach on the land.

Only the birds would survive the Great Flood.

But there would be no doves to deliver olive branches from the new world.

Torwächter B, possessor of Shinji's heart, stood its ground as the U.S. Eva charged toward him.

< <You're mine now! With your heart, I can finally drive this body! > >

Meanwhile, a different party watched as Six and Mari carried on their meaningless conversation while fighting Angel Carriers.

“There goes your plan.” Ayanami Rei Quatre scoffed at her passenger.

“Those two are very much alive *and* in possession of the lance.”

“The quadruped and the puppet will die on this rock when it falls to Earth. No rush.”

For once, the Kaji-vessel was in the entry plug with Quatre. The A.T. Field would usually provide protection against any kind of environment, but the field would dissipate upon a pilot losing her consciousness. Having fallen off an Eva under those exact conditions, Seele/Kaji seemed to have learned his lesson.

Quatre was in the plug seat while Kaji straddled the interior as if he were sitting on the edge of a dinghy. He struggled to fit his long legs in the cramped cockpit.

“The beast’s execution shall commence forthwith.”

They had succeeded in transporting themselves to a place that wasn’t the Earth, nor the moon, nor the Apple’s Core.

The broken slab of rock was still technically part of the moon, and Quatre’s mutant Eva had managed to use the tunnel network to warp to this newborn heavenly body.

“The two were once one, no matter the distance between them. We merely used this fact to travel here,” the Kaji-vessel said.

Quatre’s Eva was the first to be infected with the black giant Armaros’ scales. Seele, who now possessed Kaji, was able to control an Eva pilot through these Q.R. Signums.

Quatre couldn’t fight back.

Back on the Apple’s Core, she’d traded herself for Trois to be Kaji’s puppet. But her goal was no longer to escape the primary emotions that ruled the Ayanami clones…in her case, fear.

This world would be destroyed and born anew, Seele along with it. Quatre was intent on watching the whole process.

This was the world Shinji had created three years ago when the Human Instrumentality Project failed. Quatre thought that was a good

enough reason to kill him. Whatever Seele/Kaji did, it was as a prophet who signaled the end of this world and prepared for the next.

Chapter 14:
Summons

THE MOON'S ABRUPT TERRAFORMING had caused massive panic and anxiety among the population of Earth. There was a high likelihood that the falling lunar landmass would end civilization as they knew it.

The moon slab slowly descended to the critical zone where it was either going to be drawn back to the moon or pulled down to Earth. Calculating the trajectory of such a massive object was simple enough, but astronomers couldn't work out whether it would actually penetrate the atmosphere, given its shallow point of entry.

The EU and U.S. urged the use of N_2 warheads, which had been under the UN's lock and key since before the Second Impact. Nuclear weaponry had been sealed away deep underground, but the gigantic rock in the sky seemed a noble enough motive to warrant its use.

The moon slab was so massive that its entry into the critical zone might rotate the Earth on its axis. Although, the worst-case scenario of it ramming straight into the planet was still likely.

The EU and U.S. were now in talks about a plan to break up the lunar mass into smaller fragments. Moving the slab out of the way remained the best course of action, but it was much too large.

"Maya-san, is there any way to destroy and then dispose of the detached mass?"

<<I don't perform miracles.>> Maya sighed through the intercom from the cage.

"The main issue is the lack of distance from us to it. Whatever we do will cause catastrophe below."

It was a bitter pill to swallow, but someone had to say it.

"Even if we were to break the slab into small chunks, those chunks would continue to fall to the Earth for several hundred years. Meanwhile, whatever's left in the atmosphere will remain in the atmosphere. Humankind will never set foot in space again…assuming there's anything left of us by then."

"Not to mention," said Misato, "the moon's right behind it."

The approaching moon slab was only a prelude to the real disaster.

An operator prompted Toji to look at the main display. Super Eva had safely returned from orbit.

“Shinji! Why’s Super Eva all burnt?! Maya and the rest of her team worked real hard to clean him up, you know!”

The purple giant had failed to properly decelerate when reentering the atmosphere. He took a few clumsy steps forward, as if he were underwater, and then began sinking into the ground, despite the lack of elevator shafts.

“What the hell?!” Toji exclaimed.

All eyes were fixed on the display, though not a single soul knew what was going on.

Shinji watched as a vast flock of birds flew across the sky, like rapidly moving mist.

I wonder where Kaworu-kun’s last dove is… I couldn’t catch it last time…

The white mist turned to darkness. *A mountain? And stars? What was I doing…?*

Wait! I just landed with Super Eva.

What am I looking at?!

Was he dreaming? The white mist rushed closer, and the flock of birds passed him like the wind.

When the mist faded, he noticed that Asuka—Torwächter A1—was beside him.

THRUM!

Shinji’s chest burned with his heartbeat. He felt blood rushing through his veins. The Center Trigonus in his chest burned as bright as a furnace. The heat it produced certainly wasn’t imaginary. If this was where Shinji’s stolen heart was, then—

“I’m seeing the world through Torwächter B’s eyes…”

Crap!

A chill gripped him as he made this realization. *Why didn’t I think*

about it before? If I can call upon my heart's power from afar, then the heart can summon me to it—

THRUM!

<<Return my body. Return to me that which you wield.>>

It was the voice of his other self.

"No… Wait!"

Wolfpack held the Lance of Longinus in its mouth. It shoved away an Angel Carrier and lunged at Asuka/Torwächter A1. Shinji, as Torwächter B, readied his giant weapon to protect her.

A weapon?!

<<Shinji, stop that this instant! What do you think you're doing?!>>

Maya's voice yelled at him through his speakers… Was he back in the cage?

Shinji's consciousness was merged with Super Eva's. He didn't see through his entry plug but through the Eva's eyes. The giant's hands were his hands. *What am I…?!*

"The heart is calling out to me… Maya-san! It wants…the weapon…I'm wielding!"

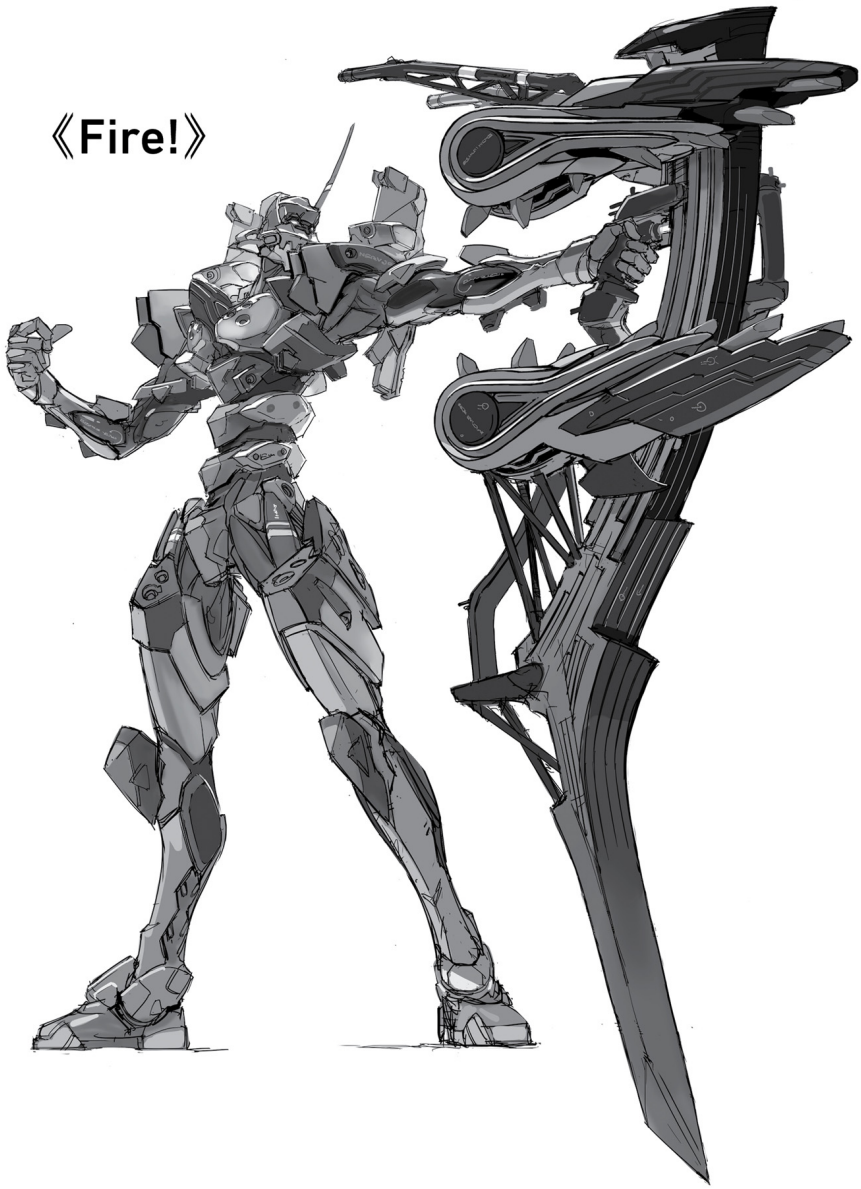
What am *I wielding?*

Super Eva's distant heart realized that he held the great bow Azumaterasu in his left hand.

<<Fire!>>

Shinji lost control of his hands, and they aimed Azumaterasu high into the sky.

Azumaterasu—previously dormant—finally activated.


《Fire!》

Particle induction elements attached to the top and bottom of the bow's frame lined up with their seven respective power injectors.

Seven dazzling beams of light focused in the center as Super Eva's body rumbled. His distant heart was aggressively pouring energy into him.

Yet it still wasn't enough.

Shinji felt like he was being strangled. He wheezed as he desperately tried to breathe.

Stop! He croaked. His heart beat louder and louder, as the life was being choked right out of him. *That's still not enough?!*

Shinji couldn't have stopped the flow of power even if he'd wanted to. He wondered if Trois could've done something about it if she were with him.

<<The vessel of the interlocutor must not fall into the hands of the beast.>> He'd heard something similar back in the Tower of Babel.

This voice… Shinji's consciousness faded as the seven lights pulled in limitless amounts of energy. He felt himself and Super Eva drift away in the flood.

The lights focused into a single ray.

Is this an arrow…?

And with that, he faded into a wall of white.

Alarms blared throughout Nerv Japan as the base shook.

The seven-colored bolt of light didn't just blast the reinforced roof off of Cage Two. It had a disastrous effect on the people outside as they were freed from the shackles of gravity and turned upside down.

They looked beneath them, at the sky over Tokyo-3, and found that a portion of the blue veil had been pierced, leaving behind a gaping hole that magnified the stars of outer space.

The moon that had loomed over the Earth and its smaller slab were gone. It seemed as if the atmosphere had vanished, too. Azumaterasu's arrow of light sped by so fast that it didn't even produce a whisper. The only thing the bolt left behind was the harsh contrast of black and white.

A violent storm erupted after that moment of miraculous stillness, and the sky sucked up anything that wasn't nailed down, as if to demonstrate the repercussions of halting time.

Then again, the sky also needed everything it could get its hands on to patch the gaping hole in the atmosphere.

The arrow reached the lunar landmass at the speed of light, burning so bright that it seared a hole right through the Earth's upper atmosphere. Once the light faded, only half of the lunar landmass was left behind. Even its fragments had been displaced.

The sky above Tokyo-3 sucked in everything around it. The surrounding air pressure rose to over 6500 hectopascals, causing great shock waves at all altitudes.

The window of the sky was slamming shut, and everything in and around the Hakone caldera was getting the brunt of it.

Most of the command center personnel had collapsed once gravity returned. Toji, however, had hooked his pale blue arm around the desk console and braced himself. By the time he got his feet back on the floor, damage reports from all over the base were flooding in. The command center turned into a buzzing beehive, but Toji remained calm and called Cage Two.

"Maya-san, report! What did Super Eva do?!"

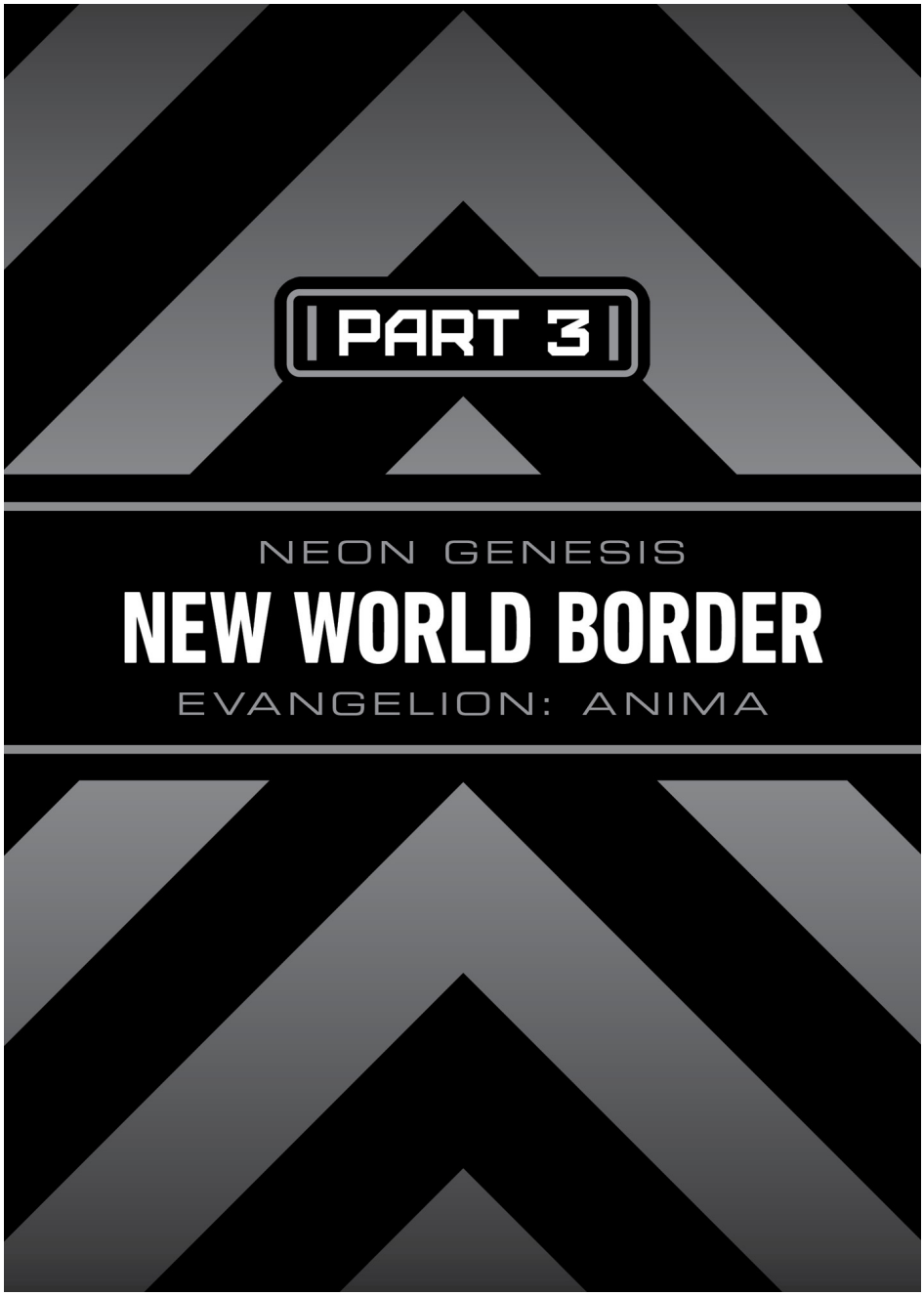
Outside, an artificial night had fallen as clouds formed from the drastic difference in pressure. Heavy rain poured out of the sky, as if someone had punched a hole through the heavens.

Water rushed into the now-roofless Cage Two like a waterfall. Maya watched from the blast shield of her control booth as the gigantic salt sculpture before her crumbled.

"No!"

The thing that had been Super Eva was now falling apart.

The bow had disappeared immediately after firing, and now the white salt giant was being eroded by the heavy downpour, starting from its shoulders. Its body broke off into clumps, each over a hundred meters long, which fell to the ground with a resounding clang that echoed its destruction.


PART 3
NEON GENESIS
NEW WORLD BORDER
EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 15:
Aftereffects

THE SEVEN-COLORED ARROW fired from the great bow Azumaterasu had annihilated half of the landmass that had once been part of the moon. The remaining half was now a hundred thousand kilometers away from Earth.

The moon slab hadn't been blown into chunks but was rather displaced by the massive surge of neutrinos and gamma rays.

The arrow incinerated the Earth's upper atmosphere, leaving the surface exposed to dangerous radiation. This event should've had catastrophic repercussions, because of how much energy had been spent over such a short period of time. That kind of power should've been enough to raze the entire planet. However, most of the energy had seemingly dropped off into another world altogether.

Although the primary threat had vanished, the world was still in hot water, which seemed to be fast approaching its boiling point.

<<Unit Zero, Trois… Communications…breaking up…hear you —>>

Eva-0.0 was still in orbit. Ayanami Rei Trois had managed to protect herself from the gamma-ray storm by throwing up an A.T. Field around them.

"Hakone command…Unit Zero…broadband electromagnetic interference…can't pick you up! Follow ECCM protocol…change coding rates. I repeat—"

Hyuga's voice crackled from Hakone, barely penetrating the short wavelengths of the ultra-high frequency transmission line.

The high energy particles had blasted the ionosphere, creating intense electric surges between the E and F layers. This was the cause of the communication problems. To make matters worse, stratospheric communication platforms belonging to the U.S. and China ignited like metal in a high-altitude microwave. The various aircraft consequently fell into the Pacific and Caribbean.

In a world that had lost both its satellites and underground cables, due to changes in the Earth's gravity and crust, communication relied on seven stratospheric airships to relay messages over the rapidly shrinking planet. The loss of even two of these aircraft was a heavy one.

The particle blast also affected things at the lower altitudes. Over a hundred and fifty planes had crashed, high-frequency harmonics had infected the power grid of the eastern hemisphere, and a large-scale power outage had brought the world to its knees.

People desperately tried to contact emergency services, but their transmissions had no way of getting through.

Heavy rain still poured over Hakone.

Here, the damage from the discharge of Azumaterasu was far heavier than the torrent of high-energy particles falling from the sky.

The loss of gravity after Azumaterasu's firing, though temporary, had massive repercussions for the Hakone caldera and its surroundings. The shock wave generated from the vacuum of the concentrated atmosphere was reminiscent of the Tunguska event. Trees around the caldera were knocked down radially, and it caused heavy damage to Tokyo-3.

Fuyutsuki was issuing orders from the top deck of the command center, doing his best to keep the damage under control. He tapped the console screen with his finger and watched as the death toll rose into double digits.

"And it's still going," he said. The number of missing around the Hakone caldera was four times that. The number of injured was now in the five hundreds.

When the great bow had fired, it felt as if Earth and space had been connected, if only for an instant.

We got off easy, if you think about it. But Fuyutsuki kept his thoughts to himself and continued issuing orders.

"Instruct everyone moving to evacuation centers to bring hats and long-sleeved clothes. The ozone layer isn't going to fix itself overnight. Once the clouds are gone, the sun will rain powerful UV rays down on us."

"Trois in Unit Zero to Hakone command. Come in."

Trois had switched over to infrared wavelengths and transmitted her messages via laser. Her voice wasn't crystal clear, but it was at least more intelligible than ultra-high frequencies.

"Receiving telemetry data," Hyuga said while looking at the screen. "Looks like you and the Eva are doing okay."

Trois transmitted what she was seeing in real time. Earth was spread out on the main display, with Hakone as its center. Half of the globe was whited out, and the ground wasn't visible from where she was.

"Clouds…?"

The high energy also stimulated the deep atmosphere, leading to the formation of cloud seeds, which eventually became thick clouds that made the Earth look like cream soup from outer space.

Fuyutsuki sighed. "I guess we won't need umbrellas today."

Electromagnetic mayhem had arrived, with radiation in tow.

What's next?

Trois answered the unspoken question for him.

<<A dense cluster of moon fragments is coming your way. The first wave is the remains of the lunar landmass whose matter had been displaced. After that, the second wave will come in, made up of more fragments of the moon. They're as big as a car, and there's about 720 of them. ETA of first wave is thirty-eight hours.>>

The damage caused by these fragments would be far less than the whole lunar mass, but it would still be devastating.

We'll have to break them up into smaller pieces somehow, Fuyutsuki thought. "Trois, use the Eva's laser cannon to break up the larger pieces. Unfortunately, we'll have to postpone the search for Six."

Ayanami Rei Trois paused, but she didn't look disappointed. <<Affirmative. Wait… The U.S., Europe, and Africa are all requesting to relay communications to the directors of Nerv Japan.>>

"They're what?" Now that the stratospheric communications network was damaged, the nations had taken to using Eva-0.0 as a makeshift comms satellite.

<<Signal source is eastern France, European Emergency Taskforce, Intelligence Division. Using the UE9 United Nations Armed

Forces cypher.>>

Hyuga frowned when he read the message. He looked to the top deck and signaled his discontent to his commanding officer.

“America, Europe, and Africa are asking how we destroyed over half of the moon slab’s mass. In addition, they eagerly await our next operation and will cooperate when the time comes. They’re asking for an encore.”

“Easy for them to say. They’re on the other side of the planet. Our neighbors won’t be so enthusiastic about us blowing up the stratosphere again. Tell them we don’t know what they’re talking about.”

Besides, the individual who’d been at the center of that last unofficial operation had turned into salt.

<<Assistant Acting Deputy Commander Fuyutsuki, a question, if you will.>>

“Yes, Trois?” He knew he had to tell her eventually.

<<Did an attack from Hakone cause the destruction of the lunar landmass?>>

For Trois, Hakone had been in the Earth’s shadow when the excavated weapon fired.

“Yes. We used Azumaterasu.”

<<And where is Ikari-kun now?>>

A circular railing had been installed on the ceiling to replace the blown-out roof. It stopped just short of the main command building, but it was enough to keep the rain from pouring in. Repairs had proceeded faster than anyone had expected, so visitors of Cage Two could be forgiven for taking a moment to let it all sink in.

The sight was enough to convince anyone of what had happened.

Salt. A whole mountain of it.

Super Eva had stood at a height of 120 meters. In his place was now a pillar of collapsed salt. Shimmering white particles occupied the dry deck without forming peaks. Sharp edges had been washed away by the rain that flowed down into the pool. There was too much of the substance to dissolve, however, and most of it was rapidly crystalizing.

Nothing we can do about it now.

When the original Lance of Longinus had started orbiting the Earth, over two million people had turned into literal pillars of salt. There was nothing anyone could do about them.

"What the hell happened, Shinji?"

Acting Deputy Commander Toji wore an orange protective suit as he stood in shock in front of the mountain of salt.

Misato wore the same suit, but she'd started climbing the salt that had once been Shinji and Super Eva. Inside, she felt the same as Toji, but her duties as commander of Nerv Japan pressed her onward. If she stopped now, she knew she'd lose all motivation.

The salt crystals were heavy with rainwater, but she kept on climbing the white mountain. Misato grunted and adjusted her rebreather. She drew strength from the memories of welcoming Shinji into her home for the first time.

Is that it? Am I convinced that he's dead? Nothing more than a sweet memory?

Get a hold of yourself, Misato… she thought to herself. *You can't lose sight of him now.*

<<Not a step farther. It isn't safe.>> Maya's voice came over her headset.

There is a point to all this.

Misato looked up and saw the black Q.R. Signum perched on top of the white mountain of salt like a stele.

The ten-meter-high quantum resonance plate had been spared the fate of turning into salt, even after falling from Super Eva's chest. It loomed menacingly over her.

The thing had come from Armaros, and it was a quantum portal that channeled the power and will of the black giant himself. In a desperate attempt to save Shinji and Super Eva after their heart had been stolen, Hikari, pilot of the Euro Eva Heurtebise, had taken one of her own Q.R. Signums and stuck it into his chest.

With Trois and Quatre's help, Shinji and Super Eva had managed to use the enemy's device to survive, without it corrupting him.

The surface of the quantum resonance plate gleamed like

obsidian, reminiscent of a polished tombstone.

"This is the first Q.R. Signum that has remained in this world by itself," Maya said, making no reference to Shinji or Super Eva. She'd been the only member of the main staff to witness Super Eva turn into a pillar of salt and then crumble.

Three years ago, Shinji had prevented the completion of the Human Instrumentality Project. This meant that he'd decided the current course of the world. His heart was the only thing that Armaros feared. With Shinji gone, had they not witnessed the beginning of the end of the world?

Don't be stupid. I can't lose sight of survival now.

Strange things were happening, one after another, and they were beginning to numb Misato's feelings. Maya and Misato continued their conversation, albeit awkwardly.

"We focused on this Q.R. Signum back in the Carrier fight. I don't think it would've survived that unscathed. But all the fragments end up disappearing, don't they?"

"Yes…they destroy themselves. But this thing has remained in its entirety…"

"There has to be something more to it."

Misato was expecting an answer, but all she got was silence.

"Well…" Maya hesitated but finally added, "We can't say at this stage…"

Silence.

Misato grabbed the collar of Maya's protective suit. "If you've got something to say, then say it! Shinji-kun hasn't disappeared completely! This Q.R. Signum is proof that a part of him is still with us!"

But is it? Or am I just saying that?

Misato didn't know.

"Shinji's…alive?" Toji muttered.

Maya took the chance to bat away Misato's arm. Her own emotions, which she'd so far kept under wraps, exploded to the surface.

"You're always like this! Always pushing your feelings on those around you! No one knows if he's actually coming back! Stop giving

Toji false hope!”

“Don’t you think I know that?!” Misato shouted.

But Maya, lost in fury, ignored her. “I’ll take responsibility for this. Please, allow me to look into it further. I’ll need all the time and people I can get.”

Maya knew. She’d known from the beginning, but she needed Misato to put it out in the open for her.

In any case, one thing was clear. The second she decided this was all pointless, it would *become* pointless.

Chapter 16:
Shadow Puppets

HE WAS STANDING on a shallow beach whose waves had many colors.

Countless birds flew across the sky. He didn't know where he was, but his body felt heavy, his consciousness dim. His surroundings felt like a dream, and yet, for some reason, he had no idea where he was. Maybe that was more evidence that this *was* a dream. He pondered this but felt like he was disconnected from all of his experience and knowledge.

Just recently, he'd felt that the "proof of his necessity" had overflowed into his mind and that all he needed to be was himself. Now, that proof felt thinner than ever.

He'd been freed from his own name, the things he knew, and the things that held him back, and yet he didn't feel at rest.

The seven-colored waves splashed at his feet.

He stuck his hand out and turned. *I'm not alone here.*

He saw a great serpent made of brilliant lightning slithering in the sand. Behind it was a girl clothed in red wind. The snake bared its fangs at the girl, and he leaped to protect her.

His body moved faster than his intentions. An odd sensation, as if he didn't belong to himself.

The snake curled into itself, forming a coil, and sprang. The thing had eight heads… No, even more than that. He readied the great bow and began firing, but there were too many of them. The snake persisted in its assault, though it was clearly only after the girl.

But… He felt he had to protect her…for some reason he couldn't fathom.

The lightning snake's forked red tongue stuck out of its mouth like a spear.

< <I know what that is! > >

But he couldn’t remember its name. All he knew was how dangerous it was.

Chapter 17:
Shadow Puppets

WHERE DID THAT come from?!

Torwächter B suddenly pulled a great bow from his shadow and fired at the Longinus-wielding Wolfpack. He barely missed his mark but managed to take down one of the beasts that made up the U.S. Eva's A.T. Field.

When did it…? The bow wasn't taller than the Torwächter.

The moon slab was still drifting toward Earth. Although it had lost half of its mass from Azumaterasu's arrow, its surface was more volatile than ever. Fissures formed on the ground, debris flew in every direction, and to top it all off, the avian hallucination still flittered across the surface.

Torwächter A1, also known as the Asuka/Eva synthesis, was still being targeted by Mari. But Torwächter B, the black giant in possession of Shinji's heart, had jumped in between them to protect her.

The attacks are getting worse!

It was as if something had possessed the black giant… In fact, the change had a physical quality to it. Mari put her nose to work. Torwächter B had left their last battle claiming to be Shinji, but—

What's going on? The black giant now had the same scent as the Shinji she knew.

B held his right arm in front of A1, as if to shield the Asuka/Eva synthesis.

Without an arrow to nock into his great bow, the black giant held out his right hand to protect the blue-eyed girl who wore the red wind over her bare skin. This was the form she took when he could see her, but when out of sight, he sensed the amalgamation of many others behind her.

In any case, the girl was fighting back. She stepped forward, clearly wanting to protect rather than be protected. She recognized

him somehow.

Who could she be…? All he knew was that she was important to him. Maybe he should ask her.

He planted the great bow in the ground as the lightning serpent darted toward them.

The Torwächter used the bow as a pivot and spun his whole body to deliver a roundhouse kick to the prongs of the lance in Wolfpack's mouth.

The blow caught the beast in the jaw, and it was sent flying. It twisted its body, extended its claws, and forcibly latched on to the ground to bring its three-thousand-ton body to a halt.

He smells different. Why?

<<You're Shinji, aren't you?! That's what you said before disappearing from Novaya Zemlya!>> Mari yelled at the black messenger that was Torwächter B. Or at least, she'd intended to. What came through her speakers amounted to little more than a canine howl.

Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was still in the fight, however, and Ayanami Rei Six had managed to understand her. <<That's not Shinji!>> she retorted. <<Shinji's more absentminded than that.>>

But Mari trusted her animal instincts more than human reason.

<<This black Shinji… He has the same scent as the Shinji I know… Have they become one?>>

Six was still fighting off Angel Carriers, and she was unable to get closer to Mari.

Mari kicked the gravel beneath her to resume attacking Torwächter A1, who was behind Torwächter B. She was fighting the low-gravity environment for footing.

<<Why are you picking on Asuka?!>> Six saw no reason for it.

Wolfpack shook its neck and twirled the red lance in its mouth like a baton. The prongs were facing the right way now.

<<Like I said, I'm going to eat her.>>

Six felt a chill run down her spine. She knew Mari was serious, though she didn't know why.

<<Stop picking on Asuka!>>

<<I'll take good care of her inside me.>>

What was she talking about?

<<Asuka! Come here!>> Six called out to Torwächter A1 as if she were playing with Azuchi and Momo. The red giant turned to face her, but she had no intention of leaving Torwächter B's side.

"Ugh! Seriously!"

Six didn't know who was friend and who was foe anymore. Her information was limited, since she'd been stranded in space since before the Novaya Zemlya operation.

Even the displays in her plug identified Torwächter B as Victor 2 and Torwächter A1 as Victor A1. She didn't know that one of them had stolen Super Eva's heart.

However, Six recognized the gravitational wave patterns of the heartbeat that spread over the battlefield, and it sounded a lot like Super Eva's.

Is that really Shinji? What happened to Super Eva?

Thinking while fighting was hard on her little head. Mari was far away by the time she noticed.

The U.S. Eva pursued the two Torwächters. It crossed a ridgeline over to the side of the slab where the sun shone. The bird hallucinations passed over Six, and she lost sight of Mari.

The Earth rose as Six remained in the shade. From what she could see of the planet, half of it was covered with clouds, making it glow like a snowman. "Why is it so white?"

Three Angel Carriers closed in on Six to block her way. After being shot at by the Field Piercer—Angel's Backbone—they'd correctly deduced that Eva-0.0 specialized in long-range combat and had no way of defending itself in melee.

Six growled in frustration. She tried to move over to the bright side of the lunar landmass, but one of the Angel Carriers jumped over Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's head.

"No!"

She was completely surrounded now. She continued jockeying to escape her cage.

Suddenly, something happened to one of the Carriers, whose back had been facing the sun. The cocoon in its abdomen broke open and sprouted butterfly wings larger than its host.

Each wing spanned 1200 meters, and they belonged to the protist-like Angel, Sahaquiel.

Chapter 18:
Christening

THE DOORS OF THE ELEVATOR SHAFT, which also functioned as a shelter during emergencies, were known to have excellent sound insulation. They opened to the top deck of the command center, and Misato was welcomed by a sudden scream.

The scream belonged to Ayanami Rei Trois, but this was no ordinary scream. It was the sound a person made when they were utterly broken. Having tried and failed to calm her, Hyuga now had his fingers on the telemetry console, poised to remotely administer sedatives.

Looks like someone told her what happened to Shinji. I didn't expect Trois, of all people, to cause a scene… I guess she really must like him now.

After her exchange with Maya, Misato was in the mood to lash out. She took a deep breath and shouted, "Pipe down, Trois!"

Trois' thoughts had overwhelmed her. She probably didn't even realize she was screaming. Misato's yell snapped her out of it, and for the first time in the transmission, Trois quieted down.

Only then did the command center personnel notice that their commander had entered the room. They turned to face her, but her expression alarmed them.

"Don't worry. I haven't given up on him yet!"

Misato grinned. She was angry at a lot of things right now—herself, her surroundings, her circumstances. Still, no one in the room had the guts to ask their commander how they were supposed to keep from worrying.

"Uhhh…" Aoba started carefully.

"New transmission from Mauna Kea, Hawaii. They've calculated the new trajectory of the detached lunar slab after the change in its mass."

He noticed that all eyes were on him now, and he tried to sound more upbeat.

“Losing its balance has caused it to change orbit. It’s going to come close, but it won’t collide with Earth! It will do three elliptical orbits before falling back to the moon!”

The command center erupted with relief. Azumaterasu’s stray arrow had not gone to waste—and neither had the lives lost in the aftermath.

Fuyutsuki looked at the slab’s new orbit thoughtfully, but Misato still frowned. How close would the moon be to the Earth by then? The lunar landmass was nothing more than an opening performance. She gathered her thoughts and took a deep breath.

“‘Detached lunar landmass’ is a mouthful. From now on, we’re designating it Yomotsu Hirasaka.”

Fuyutsuki raised his eyebrows. “The road that connects the Earth to the moon, from this world to the next—or maybe it’s the other way around.”

Chapter 19:
The Sunlit Path of Yomotsu Hirasaka

TORWÄCHTERS B AND A1 took turns firing their power shields.

Mari attempted to counter the attack by using Ramiel's particle acceleration cannon, which hovered around Wolfpack's waist, but she didn't want to harm Asuka in the process.

Mari wouldn't be able to consume Asuka if her body was vaporized. The ring of light sparked and flashed like lightning, its energy finally dissipating, due to Mari's indecision.

Part of the plate on Asuka/Torwächter A1's transformed into a spindle-like shape, and she launched it. It was a smaller version of the atlatl B had used on Novaya Zemlya.

<<Be mine, Asuka!>>

Mari was intent on devouring Asuka. She used the Lance of Longinus as a pivot to stop herself. With her pack, formed out of the Eva's A.T. Field, she changed formation to rush through the speeding spindles. After barely escaping the onslaught, they were now on the shortest path to Asuka/Eva. They jumped in for the kill but were knocked away by Torwächter B's great bow.

B threw his weight into the great bow to enhance the force of his shoulder tackle, but something was off about it.

Its movements seem exaggerated. Why?

Mari didn't have to try very hard to avoid him. She supposed he couldn't properly control his movements in the low-gravity environment. Having missed his target, the excess momentum sent B crashing across the rocky surface.

According to the information she'd received from the Europeans at Novaya Zemlya, Torwächters were empty suits of armor. Yet the tackle just now had not been delivered by something so light.

Mari felt a sudden rush of power surge through the giant. He was far stronger and more agile than before, but she still didn't understand why his movements were so exaggerated.

Torwächter B leaped and kicked at her.

These moves might make sense for a human, but for an Eva…? Is he doing this on purpose?

His hands and feet moved at an energetic pace, but it all felt wrong…

I'm being manipulated…like a puppet.

Against the lightning snake, he'd first felt ecstatic that he was moving faster than he could think. But he'd slowly come to the realization that his will was being overridden.

*<<**You called on me, and now I call on your body. That's all.**>>*

The voice came from his chest. Was it his heart?

Who are you?

*<<**I will soon become all of you. There is no need to remember your own name.**>>*

The Eva-sized telegraphs were easy to read, especially in low gravity. Wolfpack ducked B's kick by latching on to the ground.

What are you up to?

Torwächter B launched himself into a mountain behind Wolfpack, leaving an imprint on the boulder in the shape of an inverted cone. He proceeded to destroy his surroundings. *What is up with this thing?*

<<Stop flailing!>> Mari bared her fangs.

Agh! Pain rushed through him.

The one that was not him was using his body to make a mess of things. His attempts at suppression weren't working.

*<<**Wow!**>>*

Stop! Give me back my body!

*<<**You've used my powers more than once.**>>*

What?

< < You had someone who could keep me in check back then. Not anymore. > >

Who was I with?

Were there others like this girl in the red wind?

An image of a thin, blue arc flashed across his thoughts. It distracted him for a moment before disappearing.

< < This body is amazing! > >

Torwächter B jumped toward Wolfpack while swinging his great bow, but Mari and the beasts of her A.T. Field dodged him. The plate on B's back had driven into the ground of Yomotsu Hirasaka, embedded in the rocky mass like the roots of a great tree. When B's jump yanked it free of the ground, it looked like a long, fat tail.

Mari saw her chance when the tail grazed Wolfpack. She twisted her body and pinned it with the lance in her mouth.

The plate-tail immediately shattered, exploding in all directions and releasing liquid black smoke from its rupture.

What?!

Wolfpack's giant gray body was knocked back by this unknown substance. The smoke soon vanished into the blackness of space. That's when Mari saw a gigantic shadow with a thin halo of light on its back. It was her first encounter with this particular entity.

< < The black giant…code name Armaros! > >

Wolfpack regained its footing as this new shadow, shiny and slick, crept across the sunlit surface of Yomotsu Hirasaka.

The new tail attached itself to the plate on B's back. The beasts of Wolfpack's A.T. Field leaped at the opportunity.

Torwächter B thrust his great bow into the rock. He reached for the Lance of Longinus, which now lay on the ground, and twisted his body. He swung the twin prongs, and the beasts of the field dispersed into particles as the red spear ran through them. Blood sprayed from their ethereal bodies, which crystallized into crimson shards under the Torwächter's shadow.

< < Beast and Serpent, heed the words of Man. > >

Torwächter B cried out with Shinji's voice.

Chapter 20:
Underground Experiments

NERV JAPAN'S science and engineering divisions were currently combining their efforts to lower Super Eva's Q.R. Signum into the former Central Dogma—into the dome of the sarcophagus that had been the resting place of Lilith's Chronostatic Sphere, before it disappeared. When the sphere vanished, it had left behind metal piles and anchors in a neat circle, which made a solid foundation for the construction of a high-speed train.

In the center of the circle was a large tank lined with sensors and filled with ultrapure water. This setup was exactly like the accelerated particle detection rig Tsukuba University had, with one key difference. The Q.R. Signum was placed in the transfer frame and submerged into the liquid.

An orange crane then lowered a giant staff into the sealed-off space. This staff had been an Angel Carrier's weapon, and Super Eva had managed to haul it back from Novaya Zemlya.

<<The staff will be used to replicate the enclosed pyramid as explained in Shinji and Trois' report. We'll see if the Q.R. Signum reacts at all. Even if something goes wrong, at least we don't have any giants around to make the situation worse—not even Evas.>>

Maya looked at the transmission window, remembering how the Angel Carriers had appeared out of the quadrilateral boundary formed by the four staves.

"What are you—" Misato began to object, but she stopped herself when she saw Fuyutsuki nearby. She brought her face closer to the communicator and whispered into it.

"I'd really appreciate it if you didn't replicate the Tower of Babel here. We don't need any more communication problems."

The Q.R. Signum had been abnormally active inside the Tower of Babel. Within its boundaries, Carriers had greatly increased their size and strength. Outside, the Euro-Russian coalition had been plunged into chaos as all forms of communication broke down. Human interaction, photoelectric circuits, and even energy transmission had been affected

by the phenomenon. “That’s why we’re conducting it deep underground,” Maya said, wondering if her commander had even read her report.

“Our pyramid is sufficiently miniaturized. Back on Novaya Zemlya, aircraft were less affected by the phenomenon.”

This was true enough. Maya pointed out that for people inside the tower, communication was so smooth that they’d had no use for communication systems.

Misato was looking for reasons to stop Maya from proceeding. Not to be mean, of course. She was only the person in charge.

“Hang on…” Misato held her hand over the display.

Of course, she thought. There was one major flaw in Maya’s plan.

“How do you plan on making a quadrilateral shape with one staff?”

<<You do have a point.>> Maya sighed. She drew her body away from the camera to show Misato the rail circling the water tank.

<<I think we’ll end up with a cone.>>

A square at the bottom of the tank…leading up to a circle.

“Are you running the staff around the rail?”

<<Yes.>>

This was a grade school idea with large-scale execution.

<<Sounds stupid, doesn’t it, ma’am?>>

The face of Aoba’s professor, Mizusato, appeared behind one of the protective suits on the side of the screen. He was the one who’d proposed the experiment.

<<Things would end poorly for us if we replicated the pyramid *too* well.>>

It was strange seeing him there. Above ground, the world was still dealing with the repercussions of Azumaterasu’s arrow. The blast had spared neither city nor countryside, and the full extent of its damage had yet to be determined. Aid was needed across the globe in a world where laborers were scarce and materials even scarcer. And here were the brightest minds of Nerv Japan, building life-sized railways out of scraps, like model train enthusiasts who’d lost all sense of proportion.

“So, what is this experiment for, exactly?”

<<We’re going to look for it.>>

“Look for what?”

<<Super Eva, of course.>>

Misato balked at the statement and looked to Maya for help. The head of the science and engineering division only nodded. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

<<We’ve seen humans turn to pillars of salt so much lately that we automatically assumed Shinji must have died. But Shinji is an Eva. The same rules might not apply to him, even after being turned into salt.>>

<<Shinji said that his heart was calling out to him,>> Maya added.

<<We don’t know how it works, but we’re going to use the Tower of Babel’s two-way perception enhancement to find Super Eva’s ‘tracks’ while they’re still ‘fresh.’>>

<<Why didn’t you tell me this before?>>

<<Because I’m a scientist. I can’t act on a hunch. Besides, we might just learn that Shinji was vaporized at the end of all this.>>

The grinder that had been polishing the railway had been removed. Aoba’s mentor scoffed when he saw the hundreds of jagged edges still left on the rail. They looked like a fluctuating graph.

“That’s about as smooth as we can get it. Any more, and it’ll warp out of shape.”

“Indeed.” Alarms rang throughout the sarcophagus.

“All right, back up, everyone! We’re about to begin!” The old associate professor announced to the rest of the staff.

The observation team moved to the booth inside the railway loop, which doubled as a shelter, while the construction team moved out of the area via the elevator. When the effect was reproduced, it was highly likely that communication with the command room would be disrupted, which was why Toji was standing by to act as Misato’s eyes and ears.

Mizusato made ready to evacuate the area, as well. “Where are

you going, sensei?" Maya asked. She had more credentials than he did, but Aoba's habit of calling him "sensei" had rubbed off on her.

"I've heard what the phenomenon does." Mizusato smirked. "It transmits your thoughts faster than you could with words, doesn't it? When that happens, I'd rather not be standing around a pretty young thing like you, love."

"Excuse me…!" Maya gasped, more shocked by the professor's choice of words than his knowledge. The nearby personnel quickly turned their attention back to their support work.

The rail was installed at close to a ninety-degree angle. Once initiated, the railcar would build up centrifugal force and reach a point where it could sustain its course along the inside of the rail.

The staff was attached at an oblique angle to the virtual center of the railway loop. It was pointed over the Q.R. Signum's tip, which would become the apex of the virtual cone.

"Activate," Maya ordered with a whisper.

The two-wheeled railcar was equipped with ballasts, equal in weight to the Carrier's staff, to prevent it from going off the rails. The railcar started its run slowly, so as not to tip the balance.

Chapter 21:
Beyond the Reticule

NINETY THOUSAND KILOMETERS AWAY from low orbit, Trois' Eva-0.0 aimed down the sights of her arm-mounted gamma-ray laser. She watched as particles from Yomotsu Hirasaka broke off and formed a dust cloud. The moon slab was approaching her, but the distance between them was so vast that it looked stationary. Faint sparks appeared and dispersed—probably a product of the thing's rotation.

<<Seventh shot fired from main cannon. Two thirds of the target's mass successfully vaporized. 158,921 fragments remaining (excluding miniscule particles). Half of landmass remaining. Continue tracking?>> Trois' A.I. asked.

"No," she whispered to the display. She turned her attention to the eighth slab fragment. "Focus on the next target." She continued her work in silence.

The original Lance of Longinus was passing through space right before her eyes. The artifact had elongated to 114,000 kilometers and shone like a spider's thread. It flew at an altitude of 20,000 kilometers, with an orbital circumference of 157,000 kilometers. That was two-thirds of the Earth's orbit. Another third, and it would form a perfect ring.

In the not-so-distant future…

Her A.I. proceeded to select her next target, but the system list was filled up. Alarms went off as the words TARGET OVERLOAD appeared on her display.

It summed up her feelings perfectly. There were too many problems on her mind—the shrinking Earth, the expanding moon, the Longinus Ring. Even if they managed to eliminate the antagonistic giants, she wasn't certain that these problems would immediately go away.

How long would it last? How long would *she* last?

<<Change in target management. New point spotted on Yomotsu Hirasaka. Size: AA class. Estimated trajectory—>>

An AA class would be over two kilometers in diameter. Is the lunar landmass fragmenting again? Another target… Still far…

Trois' A.I. couldn't finish its calculations. She looked quizzically at it.

< <Unable to calculate trajectory. Moving body detected. Propulsion systems detec—> >

"Enhance image!"

With the sound of a hydraulic exhaust, Eva-0.0 drew its head close to the laser cannon and looked through its biggest lens. Yomotsu Hirasaka was lit up by the sun from where Trois was standing, and she needed a filter to make the image visible.

There are no humanmade objects that size on the moon.

She didn't have to zoom in much to make out the shape. The shadow belonged to a strange cell-like creature whose hands seemed to be opening up.

Trois recognized it. *Sahaquiel!*

"Flashing to Nerv Japan/Hakone command."

She sent her transmission under the title "Extraordinary Emergency."

"Silhouette of the former tenth Angel has been spotted on Yomotsu Hirasaka."

The message was sent with a cheerful chime. Then, the window for the Evangelion mutual data link popped up on her display.

"Huh?"

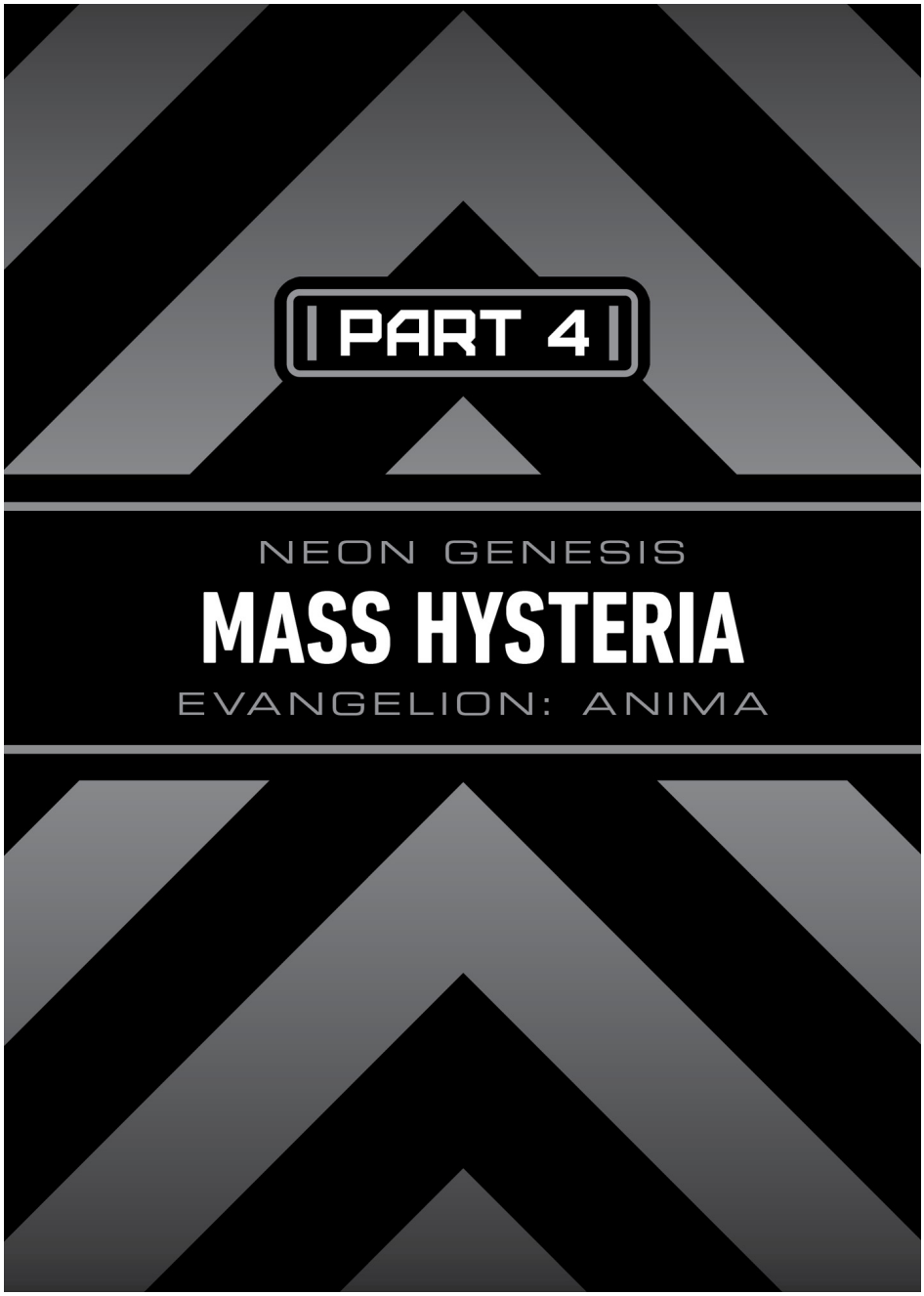
The transmission caught Trois by surprise. She was even more surprised when the 3D map slowly became more elaborate. The screen had initially displayed wireframes, but they were soon filled with a more fleshed-out rendition of the space around her. An icon flashed on the surface of the gigantic mass now known as Yomotsu Hirasaka. Trois gasped.

< <Subject identified as Unit Zero Type-F Allegorica.> >

"Six?!"

The first message she received from the Eva was Six's panicked cries as the Sahaquiel Carrier chased after her. The small Ayanami was

holding on for dear life, squeezing the transmission button in the process.


PART 4
NEON GENESIS
MASS HYSTERIA
EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 22:
Airborne Theater

TROIS MOVED EVA-0.0 into aiming position like a gunshot. Two seconds passed, then three. The giant stabilized its trajectory.

The long barrel of Eva-0.0's gamma-ray laser cannon now pointed to the detached lunar landmass a hundred thousand kilometers away from it. Specifically, it was pointing at the Angel Sahaquiel, which had suddenly appeared on Yomotsu Hirasaka. Firing at objects with a fixed trajectory was simple enough, but firing at a freely moving body at this range would prove difficult. She silenced the assistance of her FCS and took a gamble on where the creature was going to be.

"Stay where you are, Six… Now!"

2100 gigawatts of focused gamma rays traveled the ultra-long distance of space at a third of the speed of light, blasting one of Sahaquiel's wings, now over a thousand meters long, just as it was about to grab Six. The effect generated a miniature sun on the Angel Carrier's back.

"Trois…?! Ow, hot!"

Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was a good kilometer away from the attack, but sparks formed on the alloy of its restraint armor from the burning radiation of the plasma explosion.

The focused energy of the laser vaporized the right half of the Carrier's body, and with it, the Q.R. Signum on its shoulder. Having lost its trunk, the arm that hovered over Unit Zero's head blew away like a storm cloud. Six yelped from the recoil.

A sudden bustle had taken over the command center of Nerv Japan. They'd received word that Yomotsu Hirasaka, having lost half its mass, would return to the moon without making contact with Earth. Now Six, who'd gone missing in space, had been found against all odds.

"What's all this now…?" Misato said, surprised by what she was seeing. The map of Yomotsu Hirasaka gradually populated itself, first with Ayanami Rei Six's Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica and then with several

other icons. One belonged to Torwächter A1, the Asuka/Eva synthesis, while the other belonged to Torwächter B, the giant in possession of Super Eva's heart. Soon, the replica Lance of Longinus, which Shinji had thrown into space, made itself known. Several Angel Carriers then appeared on-screen, as if to complete the diorama.

"Even the U.S. Eva's on Yomotsu Hirasaka!" Misato said. "Is there some kind of space carnival going on?"

Fuyutsuki brought his confused commander the data he'd compiled. "The U.S. Eva was last seen in Norway, where it lured the Torwächters with an imitation heartbeat. They proceeded to drag Wolfpack through a gate."

"At least our little prodigal's doing all right," Misato said. As soon as those words escaped her lips, she thought of Shinji. He was gone. She wondered how Six would take that news.

Ayanami Rei Six's vitals were now on the screen. She was exhausted, and her heart rate had shot up because of the battle. Still, she looked healthy. On numbers alone, you'd never know that the little girl inside the Eva had been stranded in space.

"How's her oxygen?" Misato wondered. "She's going to hit critical levels a lot sooner at the rate she's going." She turned to the operators. "Inform Nerv U.S. via Trois of Wolfpack's whereabouts. Also, ask them about the terrestrial unit's space combat capabilities, as well as the pilot's status. I want to know whether she's alive or dead."

Ayanami Rei Trois made her appeal from the orbiting Eva-0.0, since no one on Earth seemed like they'd make it for her.

"Hakone command, requesting permission to take Unit Zero out of orbit."

Now that she'd found Six, Trois wanted nothing more than to rush to her aid on the surface of Yomotsu Hirasaka.

Eva-0.0 levitated using FSB technology, which used the explosions from tiny N_2 pellets. These reactions were controlled by the A.T. Field surrounding its waist, and they were powerful enough to propel the three-thousand-ton giant into low orbit. However, with the maximum thrust provided by the field propulsion technology of the Allegorica unit, the Eva would have no problem flying past even the distant moon.

<< Permission denied, >> came the heartless response through her comm link. << You are to maintain course and continue your mission of shooting down the falling rubble. >>

Trois fell silent. She shifted her feet restlessly in her experimental red-and-black plugsuit. It was a special model, made specifically for Asuka. The wearable device was part of a plan to salvage Asuka's personality from her Evangelion and turn her back into a human. The suit was made of orichalcum, the same orichalcum that Kensuke had entrusted to Misato. Scans conducted by the science division identified the metal as lead, but they'd managed to weave it into a synthetic skin as thin as fiber.

The suit was a humanoid medium for Asuka and thus had the quality of a charm. It worked on the concept of electromagnetic frequencies being attracted to antennas tuned to the same wavelength. In theory, a human soul should be attracted to a humanoid body, in the same way that people often saw the human form in something completely unrelated. The plan was to use this phenomenon to give Asuka a specific information filter so that she could recognize her own form. Unfortunately, she'd since gone rogue, lowering the plan's chance of success even further.

An interesting characteristic of the plugsuit was its high rate of mental shielding. At its peak, it far exceeded the current model. The same held true for the model Trois was field-testing.

That's right. Torwächter A1 is on Yomotsu Hirasaka. That's where Asuka is.

Chapter 23:
Solarside Struggles

AFTER HAVING ITS OVERGROWN ARM blown to bits by Eva-0.0 from low orbit, the Sahaquiel Angel Carrier lost its balance and dove right into the rocky mass of Yomotsu Hirasaka. Its remaining wing, now over a thousand meters long, flew straight into the ground, carving a crater into the landscape and kicking up a cloud of sediment.

As much as Six wanted to finish it off, she had other Carriers to worry about, and they were nowhere to be found. The last thing she needed was an ambush. She dove into a nearby fissure to hide.

"Cat Ears!" Six said. "Mari, are you alive?"

She tried hailing the pilot of the U.S. Eva, the girl whose genes had been spliced with those of animals. Unfortunately, the burst of gamma rays caused a storm of electromagnetic interference. She'd lost Mari's position, and now her comm link was also down.

Six and the Angel Carrier were on the Earth-facing side of Yomotsu Hirasaka. Mari and Wolfpack, on the other hand, were fighting the Torwächters on the sunlit side.

New scent coming in. Still Shinji, but weak…?

Back in Hakone, Super Eva had turned into a pillar of salt, inflicting sudden changes in Torwächter B's previously efficient movements. Mari had no way of knowing this, of course, but her keen sense of smell picked up on it. She'd been fighting against Shinji's heart in Torwächter B, but now she felt the presence of Shinji himself. The Torwächter's double movements were awkward. It was as if the injection of power had caused it to lose coordination, even coordination with A1.

In the end, Mari's target was still the Asuka/Eva synthesis. If this fake Shinji was having trouble walking straight, all the better. Now was her chance to pounce on Asuka.

The U.S. Eva channeled its will to the pack in its A.T. Field. Mari was surprised to find that the ones farther away from her had begun moving of their own accord. If Nerv U.S. saw this phenomenon, they

would be forced to admit that Mari was right in saying that she lived with the animals whose DNA was spliced with hers.

There were about twenty shades in all, which looked like distortions in space. They stalked around the Lance of Longinus before leaping at Torwächter B.

He was engulfed in the mist of the endless flock of birds. His heart had taken control of his body, and he still couldn't remember his name.

The lightning snake continued its assault. It branched off, creating twenty lesser shades of itself, which now surrounded him. Unsure whether he could protect her, he worried for the girl clothed in wind behind him.

*<<**Sweet release!**>>*

His heart turned his body around to grab the spear.

No! Stay close to her!

His heart exploded into a violent dance, as if flinging away his pent-up gloom. Using the exaggerated motion, he charged right through the swarm of snakes. He made it to the other side unscathed and landed on a sandbank. Together with his stolen body, he jumped off of it and brought the spear down onto the water, splitting it in two.

*<<**This is amazing!**>>*

He heard the joyous voice that was his own and yet not. His vision grew darker in the chaos.

What are you going to do once you're me?!

*<<**Well…for now, I'm going to free myself from my shackles.**>>*

Wait! Protect the red girl!

*<<**She is no longer—**>>*

Wolfpack's swarm rushed Torwächter B.

Chapter 24:
Visitors

ON THE SUNLIT SURFACE of Yomotsu Hirasaka, another observer lay hiding in the shadows, the mutant Eva-0.0. Within it, Seele had assumed Kaji Ryoji as a vessel and controlled Ayanami Rei Quatre.

"What an awful sight…" he murmured.

Equipped with the spear of destiny, Torwächter B swung wildly at the pack of A.T. Field beasts. It proved less than fruitful, however. The beasts slipped easily through the lance's prongs and tore into the Torwächter's poorly shielded abdomen. His heart pulsed violently as bright golden light poured out of his wound like shining blood.

"Would you look at that? It *can* bleed, after all. I'm impressed, Shinji son of Gendo… You rode on the wrong energy wave, but you managed to make it here."

"What's so surprising about that? I thought you knew the black messenger had stolen Super Eva's heart."

"Indeed. Even so, Super Eva has called upon the heart for power in the past. Now, the tables have turned. The heart has called upon Super Eva."

"So what's taken Super Eva's place?"

"An empty shell, I suppose." He grinned. "I wonder if he realizes that it is my replica lance he wields in his hands. He's done well, but none of that will matter soon. It shall all fade presently."

Quatre's face paled at the Kaji-vessel's words.

"Why?! The separated pieces are one again!"

"Because the heart retains its sentience. They threaten to crush each other. In fact, the odds are overwhelmingly in favor of the heart. You've seen for yourself how it has forgotten its primary duty."

B's heartbeat filled the vacuum of space. It was loud but not rhythmic, and golden light poured out of him with every beat. The heart was a window to higher dimensions, bequeathed upon Eva-01 by the vestige of Yui before she left the universe to replace its original S^2

Engine.

The circumstances were eerily similar to when Super Eva had almost exploded on Novaya Zemlya.

“I doubt the son of Gendo can escape the avian abyss. Soon, even his existence will be forgotten.”

Chapter 25:
Mari

HER PACK WAS a mere diversion. She didn't want anything to get in the way of what she was about to do. Mari's Eva turned to the other giant and attacked Torwächter A1.

Wonderful… How did you achieve that form, Asuka? All the entities inside you make my pack seem solitary in comparison!

The Asuka/Eva synthesis abandoned her spindle, a weapon highly effective against the pack, without a moment's hesitation. She knew that it would be useless in single combat against the U.S. Eva.

She held her empty hands in front of her. Black currents of electricity gathered and formed into the shape of a ball…the Type-F's impact bolt. It was a weapon constructed from the Eva's memories—from Asuka's memories. She launched the black bolt at her attacker. Wolfpack began gathering energy through the ring around its waist—electrical energy this time instead of a particle blast. It fired its lightning, causing the bolts to crash into each other.

The two massive charges of energy swapped positions as they propelled forward.

A part of my memories die each time they introduce a new animal into my DNA. I can't remember the faces of my mother and father, and I can barely distinguish myself these days… Whatever promises I made have ceased to be important… The only truths left are the souls within me. Nothing else seems real. That's why I'll risk everything to protect my pack! That's why I want to become just like you!

Mari roared long and hard at Asuka instead of speaking. Several hundred kilometers of the avian wind blew through the choking vacuum of space. A1 stood within the white mist of the flock as it flew toward the moon, and Mari saw a barefoot girl clothed in crimson wind.

Red petals had fallen over North Africa, over the Valley of Human Bodies, where Asuka and Eva-02's forms had amalgamated with the Ark's databank of life. This was the true shape of the massive pack that Mari admired.

Yomotsu Hirasaka turned away from the sun, setting its sights on grazing Earth.

Torwächter B took a step back from the A.T. Field creatures that surrounded him and kicked at the ground. Mari's beasts stayed on him, coordinating their attack formation to compensate for whatever losses he incurred. Although he was in possession of the lethal Lance of Longinus, it was far too strong for him, and he could barely hit his mark.

Even so, it had bought him some time. The animals were more cautious now that the humanoid form had a weapon. One of them tried to attack B from his blind spot, but by mere chance, he'd struck it with the lance. The red prongs pierced the animal, and he held it up to the stars. Light focused on the shade's corpse before exploding in a luminous display of blood. It sprayed out like a fountain, drenching the rocky landscape and Torwächter B's obsidian body, before freezing into crimson crystals in the cold dark of space.

Even on the chaotic battlefield of Novaya Zemlya, Mari had never lost an individual in her pack. Her family was ethereal, which meant they were virtually immortal. However, the Lance of Longinus had the authority to end all life, immortal or not.

B thrust the spear into the air in victory.

<< Return to the Ark, the final resting place of all life. From thence, life shall begin again, >> the black messenger exalted, using Shinji's voice.

Mari growled. She felt the pain of one of her pack dying intensely, and it caused her Eva to reel as it leaped toward Torwächter A1. Asuka saw her chance. She dodged Mari's A.T. Field-reinforced claw swipe and jumped over her, generating another impact bolt and shoving it into Wolfpack's back.

"Argh!" Mari cried. *But I'm not giving up yet!*

Wolfpack shook its head and opened its jaws, slipping through A1's arms and going straight for her neck. The Torwächter dodged, but Wolfpack managed to clamp its fangs on her shoulders. A1's field shone brighter than before, keeping the fangs from sinking any deeper and

generating a fireworks display as Mari's teeth gnashed.

Beast and woman fell back onto the bedrock. Wolfpack clamped harder onto A1's field, intent on breaking it. With a combined weight of over six thousand tons, the giants bounced across the ground.

Asuka/Eva opened her mouth to the sky, though no scream came out. Instead, her voice emerged from her floater slits, which looked like her hair. Gravitons vibrated violently, creating wavelengths that sounded like crackling silk. Red particles burst from A1's body and engulfed Wolfpack.

During Asuka's scream, Mari had started collecting the data on the countless lifeforms amalgamated inside her body. This was what she'd wanted from the start. To grow stronger. To devour and gain the power of her enemies. She didn't care a cent for the consequences.

Wolfpack's body had already grown after the battle at the Tower of Babel. It swelled even larger now, causing cracks to appear in some parts of its restraint armor, while downright changing others.

Nooo!

He was helpless to prevent it. His body continued fighting the enemies around him against his will.

He picked up a rock near his feet and threw it at the lightning snake who'd bitten the girl.

Why couldn't I protect her?!

No… Why* didn't *I protect her?!

Torwächter B spun the spindle and fired, cutting Wolfpack's abdominal shield and knocking it away. The bestial Eva twisted in the air like a cat, landing perfectly on the floating landmass.

Mari growled through her increasingly canine fangs. More beast than man, she didn't appreciate this disturbance to her data feast. Though she was being destroyed by the violent amount of life she was taking into her, it felt right. She didn't care what form she took; she'd become one with the pack soon enough.

Alarms rang from behind her. Wolfpack was equipped with a monitoring robot to prevent Mari from being assimilated into her Eva. It

could no longer sense the human amid the animal DNA.

He was angry at "himself."

Where are you going?! Protect her! I thought you wanted to become another me!

He didn't anticipate his heart's response.

< < ***With all this power, you need no longer be shackled.*** *> >*

What?!

He'd assumed the heart that was taken away from him would hold dear the same things he held dear. He'd expected them to have a similar, if not identical mind. But this…

What are you saying? Our friends aren't shackles…

< < ***What are you saying? I've been freed from all this nonsense, haven't I?*** *> >*

Freed from all relations, for better or worse. The idea made his skin crawl. Not because his heart had said it, but because he could imagine himself saying it, as well.

You're insane!

Anger overwhelmed his heart, and he picked up another rock, flinging it at the snake. He resisted the power within himself and rushed to the girl's aid, refusing to give up on her.

Torwächter B swung the sling connected to the spindle in a huge arc as he dispersed the A.T. Field beasts around him with the lance.

Wolfpack was already drawing close to Torwächter A1 again after being knocked away. When the spindle came after it, the Eva beast twisted its body in a protean manner and took to the sky, the moon as its backdrop.

Chapter 26:
Riot Red

"OW… WHAT HAPPENED?"

Pain shot through her right shoulder.

She opened her eyes slowly and found a monochromatic landscape. The night sky was filled with stars, even as the sun shone blinding rays. The place looked like the moon.

Right… I was on the moon… On a recon mission when… When what?

She felt like she'd been dreaming for a long time. A dream where she returned to Earth…

"*I'm* feeling homesick? Wait, what's with all this noise?"

Something stirred inside her. Countless somethings. She felt ill. Suddenly, a black shadow jumped in front of her, as if to protect her.

"Shinji!"

Huh? What did I just say? Shinji?

She remembered the sound of Super Eva's heartbeat amid all the chaos. She looked over the shoulder of the black figure she'd called Shinji and saw a gray beast, the alpha of the pack attacking

them. Countless voices around her spoke in unison. <<That is the enemy who is trying to devour me!>>

She knew the voice wasn't lying, because it was hers. The gray beast had inflicted the wound on her shoulder.

It hurts! It…hurts!

She leaned on her right side. Her body went faint as the pain caught up to her.

I don't know what's going on.

<<But I do.>>

What's happening…?

<<I've been here the entire time.>>

"Shinji…"

That was all she could say.

“Shinji… Shinji! Stupid Shinji!”

It felt like forever since she’d said that name.

Her body didn’t feel like it belonged to her. She felt strange, as if she was part of a crowd looking at the sky from the bottom of a hole. But for the first time in a long while, she felt the distinction between object and subject return to her. Intense pain and exhaustion were the first to come home. Then, an awful feeling behind her neck, as if the darkness had taken hold of it. She felt the need to scream and called out to the black figure.

“Shinji, did you forget about me?!”

<<Don’t say that name!>> his heart shouted with panic.

I know that name.

He slid toward her to hold off the swarm of snakes. The girl clothed in red wind put her hand on his back and shouted the name again.

She’s calling me…

<<Not you.>>

That name…

<<Is mine and not yours.>>

That’s right… I remember her name.

<<You don’t. I do!>>

Shut up. Her name is A—

<<Stop remembering!>>

You’re so indecisive. You really are me.

He raised the spear, which had taken the place of his dominant hand, to his shoulder. He felt as if he understood something.

He, who wanted his body to be freed from the burden of merely generating a pulse. He, who thought of everything as shackles. He, who wanted to distance himself from everything.

You’re the one who doesn’t want to remember.

<<…>>

Because you discarded it all. First your own name and then the names of all your friends.

He arched his body and cocked his arm.

But what have you become now that you have nothing?

He shot his arm out in a straight line. The spear flew right through the swarm of snakes.

His heart fell silent.

The world brightened as the flutter of wings filled the air. He could finally say his name: Ikari Shinji.

"Yes. That is your name."

A third voice came from the abyss. It startled him, and Shinji looked around for its source. He knew the voice belonged to Kaworu, but he was nowhere to be found.

Another pair of arms pulled Shinji down by his collar. They belonged to the girl who'd called him by name, and he finally got a look at her face. She had an awful bite mark on her shoulder, and over half of the flower petals surrounding her had been dispersed. Still, she looked proud, even victorious.

"How dare you try to forget about me," she scolded Shinji, who still couldn't remember her name. Her cocky smile remained, however. "Even if the world became a place of perfect peace where nothing could hurt you, I'd still love you enough to be the one real thorn in your side."

She pulled him in then, for a kiss that was more like a bite.

The images blew away. The background faded, though she remained in the center of his vision. The countless birds flying all around them vanished.

"Asuka," he said, without thinking about it.

"Took you long enough! Thirty-eight points," she dismissed him with a failing grade as her voice grew even more distant.

The enlarged Wolfpack dodged Torwächter B's lance throw and drew closer to its quarry—the injured Torwächter A1.

"So hot…"

A sound like a rushing waterfall came from his chest as the Center Trigonus started burning like a furnace. Golden light spewed out of the cavity into the dark sky.

His heart wasn't beating. This situation felt worse than his near self-destruction at Novaya Zemlya.

"Nothing good can come out of you, can it?"

He, Ikari Shinji, stood in Torwächter B's body with the monochromatic backdrop of the stars above him. He focused his energy on his giant black hand, which held the spindle.

Chapter 27:
Phase Shift

MISATO WAS THE FIRST to notice the anomaly in the noise. An enhanced image from Trois' optical sensors was being displayed on the main screen of the command center. She discovered something that was Eva-sized, though not quite the size of Sahaquiel's arms.

"Switch off the delay for motion compensation," she ordered. It looked as if the giants on Yomotsu Hirasaka flickered in and out of existence. The effect was made by predictive image technology to compensate for the inherent delay caused by the distance the signal had to travel. Misato wanted to get rid of this effect.

"Ma'am, these images aren't being processed," Hyuga started, but then the screen displayed something that caused him to gasp. For a few long seconds, Yomotsu Hirasaka was an empty rock, but the giants returned almost as soon as they had disappeared.

Had there been some kind of technical difficulty? If so, what kind?

The command center ran tests on Trois and Eva-0.0's mental statuses, since their vision was the source of the feed.

"All green," Hyuga declared.

The actors on the stage of Yomotsu Hirasaka really had disappeared for a moment.

"Maybe there was a large-scale spatial shift?" Hyuga proposed.

"Then why are the giants the only ones affected by it?"

"Because of the phase differential from their A.T. Fields."

"So, we're seeing a spatial distortion…but not to the point of shifting polarities."

The screen flickered again, and they saw the flock of birds that had been present throughout the entire drama of the moon rock. There was talk that the birds were flying to the moon, to set the stage for the next world. It was an odd interpretation, but birds had been known to possess strange powers, even on Earth.

"Would you laugh at me if I said that everything we're seeing

down here is exactly what's happening up there?" Misato quietly asked Fuyutsuki.

"What are you talking about? It's more than probable at this point," he answered.

"Commander, Euro Sixth Army is requesting for support. It's been approved by the UN Security Council," Aoba announced through the multitude of transmissions. Misato didn't bother hiding her contempt.

The transmission came through Eva-0.0, who was still in low orbit. General Hartmann, of the Euro Sixth Rapid Response Unit, had contacted Hakone through Nerv Germany, in hopes of collaborating on their next mission.

First, he requested that Nerv Japan return their loaned Q.R. Signum, now that Super Eva was gone.

Second, he offered to launch Euro Eva-II, Heurtebise, into space to accompany Eva-0.0. They'd developed a new weapon to deal with the leftover debris and wanted to set up an A.T. Field to protect the Earth from its evaporative effects. Azumaterasu had already razed half the planet, and they didn't want to burn the remaining half. The general also offered to equip Trois with a parasol.

Eva-0.0's A.T. Field couldn't possibly cover the entire Earth, of course, but putting a shield over ground zero should significantly change their circumstances. The closer an object was to a light source, the larger the shadow it would cast over the things behind it. By that token, the closer an A.T. Field was to a radiation source, the more it could cover Earth.

Misato stared at the plan.

"And the closer Trois gets, the more dangerous it will be for her. What new weapon is he talking about anyway?"

"Probably a system to deal with Carriers and Evas if he's asking for the Q.R. Signum back," Aoba said. "The schematics look a lot like the Field Piercer."

Fuyutsuki traced the console, which showed a simplified diagram of the new weapon.

"Code name Devil's Backbone. Europe's artificial Angel is fallen. Cocteau is turning in his grave…"

Fuyutsuki called for the intelligence division. Knowledge of Super

Eva's disappearance had leaked.

"Have all the personnel involved with Super Eva's disappearance been staying at the facility? I want names for anyone who's been in contact with the outside in the last two hours."

"He sure sounds confident, though. Devil's Backbone… Is he saying that thing is as strong as Azumaterasu?"

Chapter 28:
Shifting Blue

REI TROIS was still floating in low orbit, shooting down her twentieth piece of debris with her gamma-ray laser cannon. She was exhausting her energy reserves and also her time.

She looked down her sights to her next destination, the landmass known as Yomotsu Hirasaka. Its contours glowed in the backlight.

Rei Six was somewhere on that floating island. The sisters had never needed to talk with each other, owing to their mental link, but Trois felt she could really use a conversation right about now.

The Second Child—Asuka—was there also. She'd melted into her Eva, and yet had remained on this plane of existence. And because she was there, the giant possessing Shinji's heart must be there with her.

The heart was Shinji's last proof of existence after he'd crumbled into a pillar of salt with Super Eva.

I want to go there.

The conclusion was difficult for her to accept. For as long as she could remember, she'd never experienced a strong desire for anything—certainly nothing to disrupt the completion of a mission.

It was a pitiful fact for someone who'd never known freedom. The mission was the reason for her creation. She'd never thought of it as a thing she depended on, or a thing that held her back, but simply as her purpose in life. Yet her current mission no longer seemed to be the most important thing. Now she faced the terrible question: What was the reason for her existence?

BEEP!

Her external sensors triggered an alarm, pulling Trois out of the labyrinth of her mind. The quantum flow inclinometer warned her of the rapid approach of an unidentified object, which the radar sweeps had missed. The object's code showed on her display. Another Q.R. Signum. She felt her skin crawl as drew came closer.

Aah…

She felt ill and immediately realized what was happening. A presence that wasn't hers started to dilate the pupils of Trois' red eyes.

The alarm kept ringing. Hakone command made it through comms. Hyuga was telling her to intercept the object. But it all seemed distant. It was as if she were in the middle of a dense fog, thick enough to block out sound.

Trois pointed her long-distance antenna toward Yomotsu Hirasaka and said in a rush, "Trois in Unit Zero to Six in Unit Zero Type-F Allegorica. Caution. Black giant's mind closing in. Don't get caught in it."

Eva-0.0's A.I. had correctly assessed the Q.R. Signum as a dangerous object and altered the FCS to make it its top-priority target. Learning from its last encounter, it took aim at the empty void in anticipation of the flight path.

<<Affir—>> Rei Six's voice crackled from a hundred thousand kilometers away. <<Noooo!>> She was likely in the middle of a high-speed pursuit, which prevented her antennas from staying in place.

<<This isn't the time…consciousness…hijacked!>> She was definitely fighting for her life. But she continued her conversation with Trois, despite the fragmented information.

<<You're planning something.>>

"Yes… Please handle it."

<<Can do! You know, this talking stuff isn't so bad… Whoa!>>

And with that, Trois lost Six's signal. The youngest sister was probably all right. She'd likely had to make a sharp maneuver or duck into the shadow of a rock somewhere.

Trois set her gamma-ray laser to full charge. A single blast would be powerful enough to vaporize anything.

The data of the flying object had reached Hakone. Her objective remained the same: Shoot it down.

She was one second away from pulling the trigger. The object was on a collision course with her Eva, but the impact warning never came. Instead, the alarms for a system error started blaring in her entry plug.

Trois entered her emergency authorization code. She tapped the screen one last time. All actions were now barred from Eva-0.0,

rendering it effectively defenseless.

The S^2 Engine mounted on her back increased its output, releasing its energy through the blow-off valve. She took a deep breath in the LCL as the pistons outside her hissed and braced against her seat.

She knew what was coming next.

Violent turbulence rattled Eva-0.0, its source the neural feedback link in its left arm. Trois' left arm was thrown about, and she felt like it was tearing open.

Then she felt the black wavelengths take over her mind.

Hakone command watched as the black scale of Armaros rammed into Eva-0.0 in orbit. The screens that displayed its telemetry values showed that they were all over the place.

"Failed to intercept Q.R. Signum!"

The unexpected turn of events turned the command center into a beehive.

"Trois has ceased interceptive measures!"

"Why the hell would she do that?!"

Tempers flared in the command center until a voice caught their attention.

<<Kzzt… Aa… Aaah!>>

Trois croaked through the choppy transmission. The pain was so intense that she couldn't scream.

"Damage confirmed!"

"Q.R. Signum lodged between two bones in the forearm. Both pseudo-skeletons are broken, but the Signum is altering the surrounding tissue! Quantum teleportation is disrupting the neural network of the affected area. She's blacking out. We can't get a reading!"

"Trois, answer me!"

"Mental contamination imminent! Eject the plug! Get out of the Eva!"

Fuyutsuki barked into the receiver, but he was getting nothing but noise. Eva-0.0's satellite had broken down, knocking out the conversation they'd had with Europe.

“No response from the emergency ejection system!”

“We’ve lost contact with Europe.”

“Forget Europe!”

“Has the Q.R. Signum taken over all basic functions?!”

Did the laser misfire because the Angel’s Backbone could no longer receive orders from the plug? In the worst case, Trois could end up like Ayanami Rei Quatre, both her mind and Eva mutated.

Fortunately, they could still observe Eva-0.0 by telescope, and Trois’ telemetry readings were still transmitted to Hakone via infrared lasers. Mental contamination might knock out its transmission systems, but she was fine for the moment.

“Trois, did you actually…?” Hyuga guessed that she’d cut the power herself, but he didn’t continue.

Trois was trembling on the other side of the monitor. < <The end… Gathering of the peoples… > >

“She’s back! How is she doing?”

“Barely awake.”

The buzzing beehive of the command center froze. They tuned their ears to listen to Ayanami Rei Trois’ feverish mutterings. She was now a mouthpiece for Armaros, possessor of the black scale.

< <Behold those who have gathered before the end. > >

< <The ring…is complete. > >

< <The bridge… The great bridge will span and cover the skies. > >

< <The pillar…will bind the seven seas! > >

< <The staircase…will affix the seven continents! > >

“Well then,” Misato said, “that doesn’t sound like the usual eviction warning.”

“That phase is over,” answered Fuyutsuki. “He’s likely going to use force now.”

Trois struggled to stay conscious as the Q.R. Signum continued to infect Eva-0.0’s plug.

“Blessed are those who board the Ark—”

“…”

That was the last of it, it seemed.

Trois felt lightheaded and exhaled in the LCL. Sharp pain shot through her lungs.

< <Hakone command to Unit Zero. Trois, if you can hear us, please respond. > >

She couldn’t understand what they were saying. Her body felt like it was burning from a high fever.

Eva-0.0 looked down upon the Earth, helplessly tumbling in low orbit. Trois thought she’d closed her eyes, but realized with a start that they were wide open when light began to filter in around her. The virtual display in her plug shifted from visions of the Earth, the stars, the sun, then back again, and she realized that her Eva was spinning.

The painful feedback from the Q.R. Signum remained in her left arm. *I feel sick… But how’s my unit?* A chill ran down her spine when she went to check.

“I feel something staring down the back of my neck. A pitch-black darkness…”

This was the sensation all Eva pilots felt when contaminated by the Q.R. Signum. Even Shinji had talked about it. She turned around. The error messages that had decorated the displays behind her had gone dark.

The same thing happened in Super Eva. But Ikari-kun was with me then.

Something startled her from her thoughts. Fear. But of what, she did not know. The Q.R. Signum had threatened to consume her when she was in Super Eva. The black ends of her hair were proof. But although it had hurt, she wasn’t afraid.

So why am I scared now? When did I become so weak?

< <Hakone command to Unit Zero. Trois, can you hear us? Please respond. > >

Her left arm wanted to scratch something. Her hand curved into a claw, and she had to consciously uncurl it.

Calm down… I’ve felt the Q.R. Signum’s contamination through

Quatre before.

"Urk… Aah…"

There was that time with Super Eva, too.

Besides…I'm doing this of my own will.

< <Nerv Japan via Unit Zero to Euro Sixth Rapid Response Unit… Transmission to Hakone command was lost due to electromagnetic interference and equipment damage. > >

Hakone could only stare at their monitors in shock.

"Rei Trois…has made contact with Europe!"

"Trois…? Trois, what are you doing?!" Misato jumped out of her chair and shouted into her receiver. "You don't have to worry about that, we'll take care of it—"

She lowered her gaze from the main display to the middle deck. Hyuga was shaking his head. "There's a lot of interference, but not enough to affect encoding levels. Certainly not enough to lose comms…"

I knew it! So what is she doing?

Misato racked her brain trying to figure out Trois' plan. Trois' pained groans continued through the speaker. < <I've received a message from Hakone…acknowledging their cooperation with General Hartmann of the Euro Sixth Army. I, First Child Ayanami Rei Trois…am to escort Euro Eva, Heurtebise, to the detached lunar landmass, Japanese designation Yomotsu Hirasaka. > >

The bees of the command center started to buzz again.

"That girl!"

"Furthermore," Trois continued, struggling through the pain, "regarding Super Eva's Q.R. Signum… I am in possession of it."

Eva-0.0 usually saw the world through the lens of its gun camera. Now, Trois opened the masked eye on its head to look at its left arm. The Q.R. Signum was lodged inside, threatening to take control. Eva-0.0's right arm gripped it tightly to contain it.

"And please…send Eva Euro-II…Assistant Class Representative

Horaki…immediately.”

Six was holding her hands to her ears, screaming, “I! Caaaan’t! Heeaaar! Yoooooou!”

Fortunately, nothing got through to her this time around. She lowered her sync rate as low as it could go and shut her eyes and ears to let the black giant’s message pass over her.

PART 5

NEON GENESIS

LENS

EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 29:
Black Armor

SHINJI SWUNG THE SPINDLE, changing the trajectory of the hammer. It caught the heads of two A.T. Field beasts with a satisfying thud, though the blow didn't kill them. The horde of animals was smarter than Shinji had thought, and he needed to time the firing of his spindle to hit them. He finally saw himself as a giant and not merely a pilot.

He was now Torwächter B, one of the black messengers.

Damn it!

Shinji didn't have the luxury of ruminating on his new identity. The other Torwächter, Asuka, was gravely injured behind him. In fact, she was leaning on his back, since she could barely stand on her own.

Their hyperspace connection plates rumbled whenever they touched each other. He wanted to use them to open a gate so they could run away, but he didn't know how.

<<Stupid Shinji!>>

Her voice had been the one to awaken him. He felt like he'd met Asuka in human form, and she'd somehow regained her sapience and language.

How much of this is a dream, and how much of it is real?!

One thing was for sure. Their attackers were after Asuka.

The quadrupedal American Eva led a pack of twenty A.T. Field beasts. It had devoured the data of several thousand life forms from Asuka, severely injuring her in the process. It was now much larger than the first time it had expanded, back on Novaya Zemlya.

"I know it's you, Mari!"

Mari kept attacking them. She'd already recognized Shinji and Asuka as enemy Torwächters B and A1, and that they were to be destroyed. In fact, she *wanted* to destroy them.

Shinji felt every sensation of the Torwächter as his own. He'd achieved synchronization rates similar to those with Super Eva. From

the surface of his armor, he felt the violent lack of humanity and reason coming from Mari and her pack. They'd been dulled to nonexistence. She didn't care whether she was up against Super Eva or a Torwächter.

Maybe I'm still dreaming.

But his heart, the dimensional window that had forgotten its own pulse, was billowing endless amounts of energy in his chest. The consuming fire felt real, and it tethered him to reality.

I have no idea what happened or how I did it…but I guess I got my heart back.

Even so, it was no longer fulfilling its purpose. It had reverted to the volatile state from before he'd learned to control it, back when the S^2 Engine faced the threat of a meltdown.

Heat and pressure rumbled in his chest like a chaotic drum. He had no way of holding back the mounting energy.

Third Impact.

Not long now. I can feel it.

Shinji shot at the field beasts again, but Wolfpack easily dodged his projectile.

"Stop it, Mari! Please!"

She didn't respond. Shinji wondered whether he could transmit his thoughts to her through the black messenger's body. Either way, Mari seemed to have made up her mind about them both. His pleas for peace were ignored.

"Damn it!"

The U.S. Eva got on all fours again. It called the field beasts to itself, pawed the ground, and charged.

"Asuka, fly! Get out of here!"

The Asuka/Eva synthesis tried to get up but failed, unable to find her balance.

"You have your graviton floaters, remember? Those things stumped Maya because she couldn't figure out how to make N_2 reactors so small… Now, fly!"

Shinji wasn't going to give up on her yet. Asuka remained on her knees, but she was now producing gravitons out of the tiny slits in her

hair. Unfortunately, it seemed like it wasn't enough.

"Keep going!"

Torwächter B turned and grabbed A1 moments before she was shredded to pieces by the claws and jaws of the field beasts. He kicked the ground beneath him and jumped, covering vast expanses of the monochromatic terrain. With half of its landmass vaporized, Yomotsu Hirasaka was now about two hundred kilometers across. Aided by the low gravity, his jump was strong enough to escape the small planetoid.

But he felt something pull at him from behind.

What?!

"The plates!"

The plates on their backs were mysterious tools of the Human Instrumentality Project, which could dislocate space as long as they were touching the ground. They were connected to a hyperspace tunnel network, which could reach to the other side of the sun. How much distance it could actually cover was impossible to calculate, but right now, the plates were refusing to let go of their supposed power source.

I can't…break free!

The plates on both Torwächters had lengthened to over ten kilometers, pulling them back to Yomotsu Hirasaka's surface.

As they fell, Shinji saw the Earth rise on Yomotsu Hirasaka's horizon and gasped. He saw the moon, which he'd last seen from the other side of the sun. He saw the rocky ground beneath him. In that instant, he knew where he was and felt homesick. The plate on his back continued to pull him down toward the wild beasts.

"We're so close! I can see it!"

He felt the absurdity of injustice as a weight that yanked him to the ground. The tether of relationships…an umbilical cord he could never sever.

We're tethered to the ground!

Something like claustrophobia seized him at that moment. He remembered hearing that the black giant was a prisoner of the Earth.

<<*Humanity must not obtain wings,*>> Armaros had said when Super Eva received his Vertex wings.

"Damn it all!"

The Earth sank below the horizon again, and he watched as the cruel rocks below him approached with great speed.

Chapter 30:
Hikari Redux

<< AYANAMI-SAN OF NERV JAPAN, this is Horaki in Heurtebise. I'm linking your Eva-0.0 to the Euro mission. Your designation will be Magus, for "magician." >>

Trois was still fighting the corruption of the Q.R. Signum lodged in Eva-0.0's left arm, and yet she noticed there was something off in how calm Hikari was.

"This is Ayanami of Nerv Japan. Copy that."

Ayanami Rei Trois watched as the Euro-II Heurtebise approached her from the east, appearing first as a dot on the horizon. It sped past her, and she turned to see it disappear over the western horizon. Strange. Between the two of them, she was supposed to have the higher orbital velocity.

<< I'm here, Ayanami-san. >>

Heurtebise fully caught up to Eva-0.0 on its next run. It exceeded Trois' orbital speed and came in from behind. Her Eva was floating diagonally now, and Heurtebise corrected her course into the proper elliptical orbit.

"Wow."

Trois didn't feel the same amount of danger that she'd felt when she and Shinji made the ascent into low orbit. Hikari had attended the school for pilot candidates, but she didn't remember her ever going through maneuver drills. No wonder she felt strange about her calmness.

A parallel consciousness… The dummy plug system…

Heurtebise was unique among the Evas. The Euro unit utilized both a pilot and a dummy plug, though no test pilot had ever managed to survive for very long inside of it.

But it was different with Hikari. When she came along, an entity inside the Eva had protected her mind from breaking under the pressure of the dummy plug. Heurtebise was one of the failed specimens that had been cast away during the production of Asuka's Eva-02. It was thought

that the Eva responded to Hikari's fond memories of Asuka.

Meanwhile, Hikari's mind had melted and expanded into the Eva's body, culminating in its split-second decision to take her own Q.R. Signum and transplant it into a dying Super Eva.

"Magus's signature is linked to the mission network."

Now that Trois was connected, parts of her data were shared with the other side. Her A.I. bombarded her screen with countless warning windows, protesting the fact that the Europeans were at her telemetry gates and anxious that she'd betrayed Nerv Japan. She closed her windows until she finally found the European timetable. The mission was already underway.

A shadow loomed over her, and she lifted her eyes, blurry from the scale's corruption.

"Huh?"

Heurtebise was uncomfortably close. A lengthy container on its left shoulder split open at its edges, and Trois was shocked at what was inside. A dragon's head—plated with scales, just like in fairy tales—twisted its neck to look at her.

"What?!"

The dragon opened its maw and bit the Q.R. Signum together with Eva-0.0's left arm. Trois recoiled and tried to pull back, but Hikari spoke to her in a calm voice. <<Don't worry, this is just the barrel of the Devil's Backbone. Can you disconnect your plug and withdraw it to its initial depth?>>

"No…I don't think so."

<<I'll have to ask you to cut your neural feedback and close your eyes, then. You might trigger your A.T. Field if you don't. Ready?>>

Hikari waited for precisely one breath before saying. <<Brace…!>>

Heurtebise's gigantic right arm started spinning as it brandished a halberd. A loud rumbling echoed inside Eva-0.0's plug. Trois' A.I. had already cut her neural feedback, but Rei had been synced with her Eva mere moments ago, and intense pain ran through her entire body.

“Eegh! Aaargh!”

Heurtebise had not only amputated the Q.R. Signum but the rest of Eva-0.0’s corrupted left arm with it.

< <Looks like you really had it, after all.> >

Hikari showed none of her usual hesitation when she was inside her Eva. It was almost as if she’d made its instincts her own.

< <Heurtebise to Kommandobrücke. Amputation was unable to stop the infection of Magus’s tissue.> >

< <This is Kommandobrücke. We’ve finished analyzing Magus’s chest and left arm. We’ll try stopping it using telemetry from our side.> >

Trois entered the emergency codes that would’ve let transmissions through to her unit, but some parts of her system were still barred from the Europeans. One of their engineers ended up using a virus to bypass some of her internal malfunctions and quickly began repairs.

The 3D bodies on her virtual display kept shifting from one shape to another. Red warning cubes turned blue and disappeared, and whatever cubes were left on the screen were now a cautious orange.

Her arm twitched as she held it down. The pain from the sudden amputation remained with Trois, despite her being disconnected from the neural feedback network. The black shadow was gone, though, and Trois didn’t know whether to thank the orichalcum-laced plugsuit for its mental shielding properties or Hikari’s borderline reckless decision-making.

< <Hikari, have you secured the Q.R. Signum?> >

< <On it. T minus thirty seconds.> >

Trois got the feeling that the people outside had forgotten about her as the busy transmission continued. She listened while holding her throbbing arm, but the only thing she could think of through her shallow breaths was the code name of the Euro Eva’s new weapon—Devil’s Backbone.

< <Ayanami-san of Nerv Japan? This is Clausewitz of the Euro Sixth Rapid Response Unit. I was wondering if we could use your eyes and scanners to monitor the status of Heurtebise.> >

The weapon's "barrel" was in the middle of consuming the Q.R. Signum along with Eva-0.0's left arm.

"Go ahead, Lieutenant Colonel Clausewitz," she replied.

"Horaki-san…you don't hold back."

<<I can't say I have the leisure to,>> replied Hikari with a smile. <<It's not like I don't have regrets. I felt crushed after I yelled at Asuka. I don't feel remorse while I'm in the Eva, but it's all going to hit me once I step outside.>>

Chapter 31:
The Thick of the Swarm

SHINJI LANDED back on the ground after his short hop and saw the Lance of Longinus, the forked tongue of the snake in his dreams, lodged in its own crater on the side of a cliff. He surveyed the area and found that the abandoned great bow Azumaterasu was perched on top of a hill.

He realized then what had happened. He knew why he'd been transported from Hakone to give flesh to the hollow armor of the Torwächter. He'd simply returned to where he was supposed to be. That was all.

The plates on the two messengers' backs had shortened again. The swarm of beasts were already rushing them with the speed of demons in the wilderness. Shinji was afraid of engaging these terrible animals, who had no capacity for reason.

Do I have any other option?

His black body stepped toward the duplicate Longinus lodged in the cliffside.

"!"

Was that his subconscious? Or was he still being controlled? His steps faltered.

Mari's still in that pack. I might kill her if I use this!

He looked toward the swarm again.

"No!"

The swarm kicking up the dust cloud wasn't as large as he'd previously thought. They'd split up again.

Where's Mari?!

He was looking at a diversion, which meant…

A large shadow fell over the lance. He turned, but it was too late. Shinji used all his energy to fling the incapacitated Asuka to the side and took the brunt of Wolfpack's attack with his Torwächter body.

Super Eva had weighed in at about four thousand tons, and the Torwächter felt about the same. Shinji didn't know Wolfpack's precise weight, but he knew that it was heavier than he was and that there was no way for him to stop its tackle. The quadrupedal Eva pushed him to the ground and brought its sharp claws to his face. Shinji felt intense pain as his right eyeball was plucked out and popped.

"Gaaah!"

What came out of his eye socket wasn't blood but the golden particles his heart pumped. Countless sparks flew out of Shinji's face like a fireworks festival that was too close for comfort.

Shinji kicked the pack's alpha off of him, and in that moment he felt its mind flow into him. Their last conversation on Novaya Zemlya had felt ethereal, since they'd needed no physical instruments to speak. This time, it felt visceral.

<<Eat! Eat! Consume them all! Asuka, the pack, everything that gets in our way!>>

This singular thought repeated itself, and it crashed into him like a tsunami. Mari's will was final. He knew that she couldn't respond no matter how many times he called out to her.

Shinji's heart burned with consuming energy, his right eye immolated in the same fire. He struggled to get the black giant back on his feet.

"What the hell is going on?!" Shinji yelled in a voice that was not a voice.

Kaworu answered. <<Is something bothering you?>>

Wolfpack twisted its waist in the air and landed perfectly. The former terrestrial unit had come up with this maneuver as it adapted to the environment. It pointed its snout toward the sky and howled at the frequency of gravity.

Shinji stumbled toward Asuka, but he didn't make it to her. One of Mari's field beasts had slipped past his A.T. Field and knocked him away. The pack changed formation again and spread out in all directions.

"How is Mari managing this?"

The beasts had surrounded him by the time he realized what they were doing. This was the worst possible outcome. A mob was most

intimidating not when you saw them as a single mob but when you realized they were a horde of like-minded individuals.

The swarm split up into squads that attacked him one by one. He didn't have time to aim his sling, so he swung it like an oversized rod. Claws and fangs still managed to slip through his defenses and tear at his armored shoulder. His leg was ripped open, causing more molten gold to pour out of the wound. He could only fend off the enemies in front of him, and that wasn't going to be enough. His vision darkened as he resigned himself to fate.

"Ah!"

Teeth sank into his arms and legs from behind. The world was spinning, and by the time he noticed, he'd been forced to the ground again.

His heart made a sound like a rushing waterfall. Energy from the higher dimensions began pouring out of his ever-increasing wounds, and it shook the ground beneath him. Yomotsu Hirasaka rotated on its axis, and the Earth peeked over the ridgeline.

<<Animals eat to grow and multiply. It's only following the most basic of its instincts.>>

"But she can do better… After what happened on Novaya Zemlya…!"

Shinji gripped the sling and lurched to his feet.

<<Are you sure about that?>> Kaworu asked.

Through his one eye, he saw Torwächter A1, Asuka, hurled into the air like a ragdoll by the pack of wild beasts.

"No…stop that!"

Crimson blood sprayed out of the wound in Asuka's shoulder as she was tossed about. Shinji fired an impact bolt near her limp body, but the arrow only singed the ground. Asuka fell back to the surface and was swarmed.

<<Beasts cannot sing.>>

"Waaargh!"

Deadly projectiles flew at the beasts, but the animals saw no need to dodge them.

When Shinji snapped the sling back into his hand, the particle

weapon wasn’t the only thing that returned. He’d pulled in something else as well. A weapon that had been lodged in the nearby landscape. Shinji thrust his burning black fist through the pack of wild animals and spread his fingers. Torwächter B let go of the sling, but now he held the Lance of Longinus.

< <Though their howling might be beautiful, the beasts cannot sing. Only humankind has the right to hold an instrument. I hope you play it well.> >

As if it had been waiting for this moment, the Earth rising above the rocky horizon grew hazy, like he was viewing it through a lens.

Chapter 32:
Cloud of Witnesses

THE ANOMALY HADN'T ESCAPED the notice of Nerv Japan at Hakone. The command center had already been buzzing with activity because of Yomotsu Hirasaka's sudden acceleration. Its arrival had been hastened by several days. Eva-0.0 and Trois were still unresponsive, but Hyuga kept contacting her just in case.

"Anomaly detected in the space between Earth and Yomotsu Hirasaka."

Although Trois' unit wasn't responding, it was still transmitting data to the command center. There were distortions in the image. An operator from the observation team called out her verdict.

"Displaying external cameras. Something is wrong with the sky!"

The vague statement failed to satisfy Aoba so he pulled up a feed from one of the cameras on the main tower. He soon understood why the woman was at a loss for words.

Clouds were rolling up from the dark blue sky and then disappearing, allowing the sun to shine its ultraviolet rays unimpeded. The moon, now a mere hundred thousand kilometers away, reflected this light, making the night side of the Earth as bright as day. At first, they were unable to distinguish where one celestial anomaly began and another ended, but then they noticed something else.

"Are those waves…in the sky?"

Ripples formed from the center of the giant moon, which moved outward.

"Did anyone see what was in those waves?"

The image was fuzzy, but eventually the spatial ripples stopped, and they were able to get a good look at what was happening. The image was upside down as if viewed through a giant lens, but it soon focused.

"Whoa!"

The black messenger was spinning his spear. Blood splattered all

around him as he stood in the center of a massacre.

“Torwächter B!”

The black messenger was burning with the energy from his heart. His whole body looked like it was being consumed in flames.

“Is this footage from the bright side of Yomotsu Hirasaka?”

“We suspect the lens is actually the Longinus Ring!”

“And it’s floating between the Earth and Yomotsu Hirasaka!”

“It’s a lens?! But, optically speaking, it should be too large to filter any light…”

Hyuga stammered out an explanation for Fuyutsuki. His rationale was solid, but it didn’t explain the image.

“Could it be an optical illusion?”

“Their positions match with the data we received from Six!”

“Which means the unit engaging the black messenger is the U.S. Eva. It sure looks different from the one I saw in Mount Daikan Airport, though.”

Misato scratched her head in frustration. “Maya’s never here when I need her! Any news from the underground experiment team?”

“It’s been two hours since they cut comms.”

“What do you think, Fuyutsuki-sensei?” Commander Misato turned to Assistant Acting Deputy Commander Fuyutsuki for help.

The lens showed Torwächter B wielding the Lance of Longinus like a naginata. There was a large crack in his armor, which ran from his chest to his shoulder, but he looked…fuller than before.

“Is that a technical question?”

“No. What do you think of the lens? Who is it showing this footage to?” Misato examined the image. She looked at the cracks in B’s armor and gasped. “Wait…how is this possible?!”

“Enhance!” Fuyutsuki noticed it, too.

Torwächter B spun the spear around his waist and slammed his foot into the ground. It ran through the field beasts charging him from the side, killing them instantly.

The shock wave created new cracks in his armor as it ran up

through his feet. His waist was expanding now, and the armor split open.

“Those are Vertex wings…!”

The black armor fell away like broken links in a chain. The final piece to fall was his helmet, split in two all the way to its horns. A singular horn took its place, and his left eye gleamed under his visor.

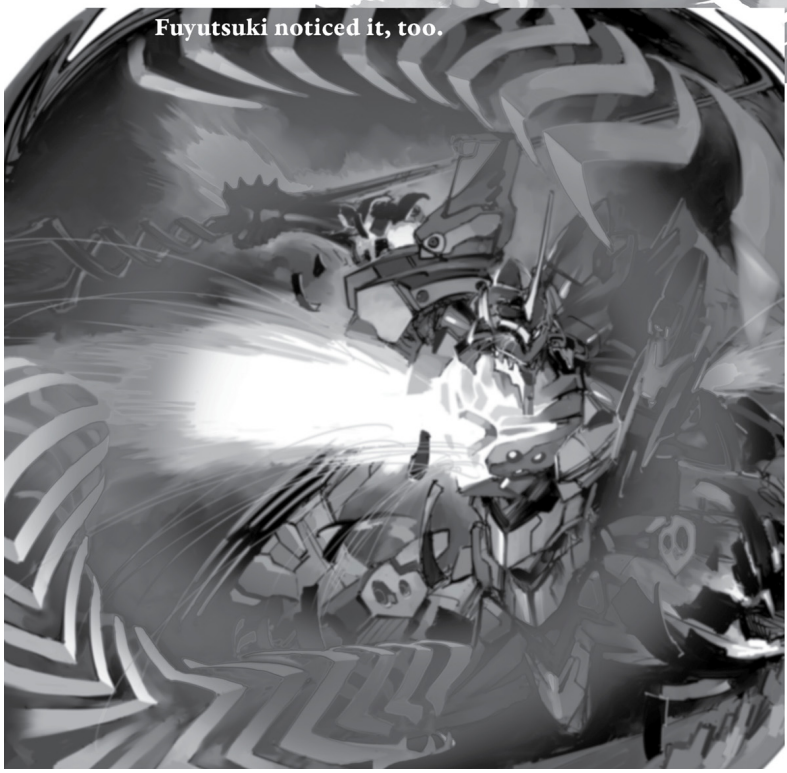
“Super Eva!”

Everyone got to their feet. The last time Hakone had seen Super Eva, he’d fired Azumaterasu and turned into a pillar of salt. Now he’d reappeared thousands of kilometers away on a piece of moon rock that just might lay waste to the Earth.

“Super Eva!”

“Enhance!”

Fuyutsuki noticed it, too.



“Shinji-kun!” Misato gasped.

“Is that what happened when his heart called for him? What’s his status?!”

“Telemeters not responding!” Hyuga said, looking from the main screen to the screen in front of him. Misato gave the order.

“Call him!”

Fuyutsuki lowered his voice in the buzzing command center. “That is more difficult than you think.”

Flames erupting all over the Eva, coming from the Center Trigonus in his chest.

“I know,” Misato said. She was startled but adamant. She’d seen this happen before, when Shinji found out that he’d failed to save Asuka. His sadness and fury had manifested in the form of flames enveloping Super Eva. Something similar was happening now. She doubted he had a battle plan. He was probably going to swing the lance until he or everything around him died, whichever came first.

“Contact Nerv U.S. under my name! Tell them to stop attacking Super Eva!”

“Are you sure about this? There’s a chance that thing is still Torwächter B.”

“I’m sure.”

“Nerv U.S. just contacted us and they’re asking pretty much the same thing,” Aoba chimed in from the middle deck.

Fair enough.

“Have we recovered communications with the eastern hemisphere?”

Aoba pointed to a continuously scrolling window on his console. “Europe’s Heurtebise apparently set up communication satellites as it ascended into orbit. You can watch what’s happening on Yomotsu Hirasaka through that lens from anywhere on Earth now.”

“Hunh… A whole cloud of witnesses.”

Super Eva and Wolfpack continued their fight unabated. Super Eva blocked Wolfpack’s charge with the lance’s shaft. Sparks flew as he shoved the Eva to one side to kill more of the A.T. Field beasts it sent

after him. No sooner did he slaughter one in a spray of blood than he twirled the spear to stab another.

"Such power… On both sides."

"You shall have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the Earth. Genesis 1:30, I think. Or somewhere in that neighborhood."

Super Eva had decimated twenty of the field beasts so far. Shinji perceived himself to be in the Eva's entry plug. He looked at the virtual display to anticipate the enemy's next movements and grabbed his control stick. He had no time to appreciate the fact that his body had been regenerated along with the Eva's internal systems.

<<Such a scary face,>> Kaworu teased.

"I know."

What am I supposed to do now?

He certainly wasn't going to think himself out of this situation. He needed to ensure Asuka's safety before the heart self-destructed, but that meant killing Mari and her. Shinji groaned.

How did this happen?

<<Do you remember the black giant's words? This form must not be given to animals.>>

Kaworu spoke into his ear again. Shinji realized that the execution the black messenger had failed to carry out on Novaya Zemlya had merely been delayed. As much as it pained him to admit, he was now Mari's executioner.

Seven more field beasts broke out from Mari. Even the Lance of Longinus was not above being overwhelmed by sheer numbers.

Shinji thought his heart's meltdown was inevitable, he also remembered that this wasn't Hakone.

In that case…

"Let the power flow to my hands and feet!"

Super Eva's limbs received an immense flow of energy from Shinji's heart.

"Urgh… Hngh!"

Intense pain ran through him as his fists and feet burned. The energy injection worked, however. Super Eva broke into a dash,

outrunning the fastest of the field beasts. He left a trail of burning footprints in his wake. He stabbed one of the beasts in the face, converting its ethereal body into a fountain of blood.

<<She has been given the form of a human, a vessel that you can communicate with. Now she has taken her gifts and squandered it on animals who can do nothing but obey their life cycles.>>

Kaworu was talking about the field beasts that were Mari's family.

They're just distortions in the A.T. Field! Shinji told himself.

But the distortions seemed real—real enough to bleed, at least. In the moment of death, he felt their body heat and smelled the iron in their blood, though these were fleeting sensations. Seele's Lance of Longinus might be a replica, but it was a replica that could take life as easily as the original.

"Stay away!"

But the swarm was intent on fighting to their last breath.

<<This is why we tasked humans with the business of the apocalypse, you know.>>

"Humans have lives, too!"

<<I never said they didn't. This is about the *purpose* of humanity.>>

Shinji looked around and saw that he'd killed the last of the field beasts. Blood floated around Super Eva's body like a red mist.

"That's enough, Mari!"

But the half-machine, half-beast continued its charge. It pawed the ground without an ounce of hesitation.

Asuka had acted the same way when she was drowned in the flood of all life forms. There was no way of knowing whether Mari was acting of her own will.

Wolfpack's ring of light fired a powerful blast of particle energy. Super Eva blocked the bluish-white light with a multi-layered A.T. Field on his palm.

A beast…cannot sing…

Shinji's painful sob was audible to anyone watching the mythological drama playing out on the lens.

“Shinji, noooo!”

Little Rei Six yelled from her hiding place with reckless abandon. Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica initiated its graviton floaters and made a beeline for the other side of Yomotsu Hirasaka.

She saw a flaming giant once she passed over the ridge. Super Eva was burning with golden fire while holding the duplicate Lance of Longinus. The tip of the red spear had already pierced the belly of Wolfpack. The beast could only flail its front paws in a pathetic attempt to break free.

“Bravo.”

The Kaji-vessel’s clapping echoed in the entry plug dried of its LCL. He watched the scene from on top of a hill in Quatre’s mutant Eva. Hieroglyphs of the tree of life began sprouting out of Wolfpack’s wound.

“Will this restart the Human Instrumentality Project?” Ayanami Rei Quatre, Nerv Japan’s turncoat, asked with a gloomy expression.

Kaji dismissed the notion. “I told you, the black giant and his messengers are mere parts of the system. As such, they cannot change the end of the world. That has already been decided. Really, it’s too late for even this disciplinary action.”

Quatre was still a bit concerned. “Ikari-kun is crying…”

“This is only the opening act. We still have to go through Act Two.”

What did the Kaji-vessel know?

“He has shown us this spectacle to build up how he will reclaim the spear and end it all. But he will come.”

Quatre stared at his face to try and figure him out.

Chapter 33:
Confined Space

"THAT VOICE... That was Shinji, wasn't it?!" Toji turned to Maya as they attempted to activate the pristine Q.R. Signum Super Eva had left behind. He took a step back. Now probably wasn't the time for questions.

"It sounded like him…I'll give you that much." Maya's answer was immediate despite her general refusal to entertain the supernatural. She wasn't quite sure of herself either, so she turned to one of her operators.

"We're still maintaining radio silence with the surface." The operator answered her question before she could ask it.

"I see… I suppose this cone is working as we hoped."

"Because we're at the heart of the Babel effect."

"We're now at 616 rpm."

"All right, keep it steady at this speed."

Conversations took less than a few words to settle inside the provisional laboratory lined with observational monitors. They'd successfully replicated the phenomenon that had occurred on Novaya Zemlya when the Angel Carrier used its staff. So far so good.

According to their records, the Q.R. Signum could greatly increase the size of Angel Carriers. They were still under radio silence, however, and couldn't have known about Super Eva's reappearance on the surface of the detached lunar landmass.

And yet…they'd all heard Shinji's voice.

They were at the bottom of the former resting place of Lilith's Chronostatic Sphere. The Carrier's staff, which Shinji had retrieved from Novaya Zemlya, was spinning on the circular rail surrounding the shielded and prefabricated provisional lab. A young researcher appeared on one of the screens, looking confused.

"Show me the findings on the quantum flow inclinometer," Maya said.

A specific portion of the graph was filled with wide-band scratches.

“I wonder what caused it. It doesn’t look like random quantum noise.”

“A powerful discharge? It looks like Niagara Falls… But I’ve seen it before.”

The question now was *where*.

Toji joined the conversation with a meaningless tidbit of his own. “Niagara Falls… Don’t they have tours where you get drenched while wearing a raincoat?”

“That’s right!” Maya exclaimed. “Our raincoats got drenched!”

“Uhh, so are we going to start sliding around now?”

“No! We were soaked with quantum waves the last time we were adjusting the mirror!”

Toji had barely been around during Super Eva’s birth. He stopped himself from jumping to conclusions and summed up the events that had happened so far to make sure.

“Shinji already died once, and Unit One’s S^2 Engine made a trip to the other side. Now we have this hyperdimensional window, which could mean we’re moments away from the Third Impa—What?”

Toji jumped out of his steel chair, and it fell to the floor with a crash.

“These readings are from Shinji’s newly formed heart. Are these wavelengths the same as when he almost self-destructed?!”

Maya shrugged, but Toji was too excited to stop.

“Super Eva’s gone, but the Q.R. Signum inside this pool should still be connected to him, right?!”

“Still… Considering the spacetime properties of this place…things could end up poorly.”

The screen showed another set of new wavelengths.

“Is this just feedback…?”

“Interference. And it’s coming.”

Chapter 34:
Rotating Rock

"HE'S COMING..." Ayanami Rei Quatre whispered in her mutant Eva. She and the Kaji-vessel were observing the events from the top of a hill on Yomotsu Hirasaka.

The Euro Eva Heurtebise had broken through the Earth's atmosphere together with Trois' Eva-0.0. The two units were accelerating toward Yomotsu Hirasaka.

Trois sensed it herself in the vibrations. "He's here!"

"Urgh… Huff…"

Shinji gathered himself as best he could and pulled the spear out of Wolfpack's belly.

"Why…?"

The glyphs of the tree of life remained.

Was she an example?

The light show concluded with Wolfpack's motionless body being nailed to a large cross.

Shinji averted his gaze and turned his attention to the dying Torwächter A1 behind him. Asuka/Eva's back plate was lodged deep into the ground like a tail, so he put it in between the

lance's two prongs and twisted. The yoke snapped in half with a loud clang.

The Lance of Longinus had played its part in bringing all causality to its conclusion. Once broken by the lance, the back plate didn't regenerate itself. Nor did Mari's Wolfpack. Her Eva was no longer considered to be a part of humankind.

The black of Torwächter A1 faded into the red of Crimson A1. Night fell as Yomotsu Hirasaka completed its rotation. The light from Super Eva's chest was the only source of illumination, and it lit up Asuka/Eva's body.

"This color suits you best, Asuka. Thank you for protecting my heart."

After he thanked her, he turned his attention to Super Eva's own back plate.

His heart burned in his chest.

< <Shinji, he's coming! > >

The sudden comm link startled him. He noticed who it was and said, "Six? What are you doing here?"

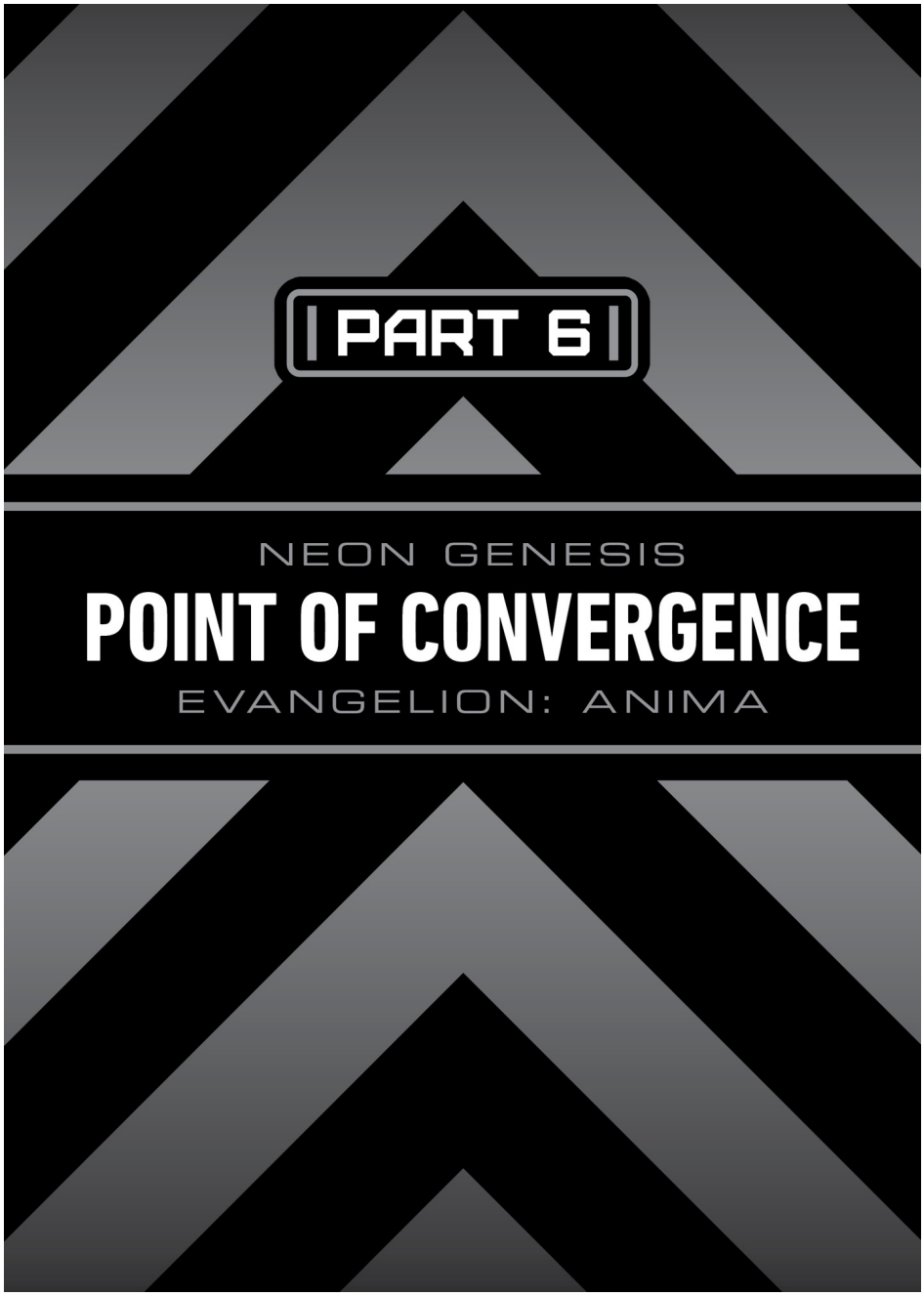
Six's Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica appeared over the ridgeline from the other side of Yomotsu Hirasaka. She'd come to prevent Wolfpack from being crucified, but the Angel Carriers had spotted her, and now she was running away from them.

< <Stay away! > >

"You shouldn't come over here, either!" Shinji answered Six, unaware that he wasn't the one she was talking to. "Just take Asuka and get out of here!"

< <Shinji, you don't understand! Mar… Armaros is coming! > >

A gigantic figure loomed behind Super Eva, casting its black shadow over the ground like a waterfall.


PART 6
NEON GENESIS
POINT OF CONVERGENCE
EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 35:
The Old Longinus Curtain

<<THIS IS Euro Sixth Army Kommandobrücke to Heurtebise and Magus. Cease acceleration and prepare for a change in trajectory.>>

The new orders from the European control room came as a surprise. They would've wasted all the kinetic energy they'd built up on their course to the moon.

<<Heurtebise to Kommandobrücke. Our expedition seekers have already penetrated the Longinus Curtain.>>

<<We can see from here that the barrier is no more, but you will make contact with that runaway train if you proceed with the current plan.>>

With Longinus? Hikari didn't understand. They'd made calculations to weave through the orbiting lance beforehand.

<<The lance has changed its orbit.>>

As the giant lens broadcast the great play of Yomotsu Hirasaka in the sky, Euro Eva Heurtebise and Eva-0.0 were fast approaching the orbiting Lance of Longinus.

The lance Shinji wielded on Yomotsu Hirasaka was a replica made by Seele three years ago, wielded by a mass-production Eva during the Battle at Nerv HQ. The original Lance of Longinus was currently circling the world, growing in length to 114,000 kilometers. It was now 50,000 kilometers away from creating a perfect circle.

Trois was desperate to reach Yomotsu Hirasaka, but the communication between Hikari and Euro Sixth had caused her to panic. Images of Cinq's Eva getting destroyed by the spear, which had accelerated at a speed of 90 kilometers per second, started playing again in her head.

<<We are researching the cause as we speak. Sending your new flight trajectories now.>>

<<Copy that. Heurtebise out.>>

Trois listened as Hikari spoke with the Europeans. She gasped then, as something appeared in her mind that wasn't supposed to be there.

What was that?

Rei Trois had been mentally mirrored to Cinq during the time of the latter's demise. She could recall every last detail with perfect clarity. But the image just now…

It was different. She was outside of Cinq, sitting in the plug of a different Eva. There had only been one other person there when she died.

"Memories of the Second Child? Asuka? But how…?"

Trois looked past the lance's orbit and focused on the giant lens behind it.

"What's that?"

A dry crackling infiltrated her thoughts, like an old radio trying to tune to the correct frequency.

<<Cinq! Aaah!>>

She heard Asuka's scream, and she saw Cinq's Eva-0.0 explode in front of her again. Memories from when Asuka had pierced the veil. Trois' memories continued to play, and it felt as if her innards were being physically gripped by them.

<<Heurtebise to Kommandobrücke.>> Hikari contacted the control center on Earth. <<I think we found the reason behind the lance's orbital shift!>>

The answer lay in front of the two Evas, who were now flying by inertia. A long beam of light, the Lance of Longinus, appeared to their right. It spun as if unimpeded by its own weight, making two full rotations around the lens, like a lace around a ribbon, before exiting to the left and continuing its previous trajectory.

"That lens…"

The original Lance of Longinus was somehow involved in the spatial distortion of the lens. Perhaps the lance had even *made* the lens.

"Ayanami-san, are you ready to change trajectories?"

Rei Trois remained silent.

<<There's something wrong with her vitals, Hikari.>>

Trois' anomaly hadn't escaped the Europeans' notice.

<<This is Hakone command of Nerv Japan.>> Hyuga's voice came through the comm link. He went on as if Trois' acts of insubordination had been nothing but a dream. <<Nerv Japan to Eva-0.0 and the European joint mission. What's going on, Trois? Your telemetry readings are all over the place. Your brainwaves are going haywire.>>

"Joint mission." That was Misato's way of covering up Trois' lies. "Am I being too easy on her?" she asked Fuyutsuki.

He shrugged. "There'll be plenty of time for lectures, should we survive this ordeal."

"Receiving reports of anomalous tides in the Pacific Ocean, due east-southeast," Aoba said.

"Is it tied to Yomotsu Hirasaka's sudden acceleration?" Misato asked.

Aoba shook his head. "It's too early to tell whether the phenomena are linked."

"Any luck contacting Super Eva?"

"No, but it seems like Six's unit has succeeded in establishing communications with him."

The lens showed all there was to see on the distant Yomotsu Hirasaka. Super Eva was supporting an injured Asuka/Eva. Behind them, a shadow loomed.

"What is it?" asked Fuyutsuki.

Something else on the screen had caught her attention. "Huh? Oh, it's nothing…"

She could've sworn she caught a glimpse of blonde hair.

Chapter 36:
Landfall

"TAKE HER, Six!"

Once Shinji had cut off the Torwächter's back plate with the replica lance, he twirled it in his hand and flung it to the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica, shaft first.

He knew what was coming. He knew the shadow behind him belonged to the black giant, Armaros. And he knew that his body was on fire. Shinji and Super Eva's shared heart was dangerously close to initiating the Third Impact.

<<What are you doing?!>> Six yelled. She seemed annoyed at his reckless handling of the replica relic.

"Take care of it. It's the most powerful weapon we have, and it might be the key to the world's fate. We can't afford to lose it!"

<<All right…you can have this, then!>>

Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica removed the two racks on the left wing pylon above her rear legs and unsheathed the Magorox sword. She threw the weapon to Super Eva.

"Thanks! Now, take Asuka and—"

Run before I become a monster of light.

But the black shadow moved before he could decide how to finish his sentence. Black pillars extended from the shadow's palms. Shinji sensed the attack and jumped out of the way.

Super Eva was off the ground before Six could secure the Asuka/Eva synthesis. He positioned himself behind the black giant and noticed the lack of a back plate. He used to have two of them, and they were both connected to the tunnel network whose gate the Torwächters could open. Shinji had destroyed both Super Eva's and Eva-02's back plates and set them free. The fact that Armaros was missing the back plates himself could be taken as proof that the Torwächters were no more.

Six caught the replica lance as she fought off the Angel Carriers.

< <Why did you stab Mari?! > >

Wolfpack lay motionless. She was nailed to the tree of life behind the ridgeline the black giant had emerged from. Shinji had been forced to kill the U.S. Eva, since it was the only way to stop them from eating Asuka. That was why he'd handed Six the spear. He was expecting her to do the same to him, should he lose his mind.

Shinji didn't answer Six's question.

His body was burning, and he could smell it.

Before Super Eva landed on Yomotsu Hirasaka, he took the weapon rack he'd gotten from Six and mounted it on the rails of his arm. It didn't quite fit, however, so he had to settle for banging the thing into place. Super Eva's armor was no longer factory standard. Bits of the Torwächter's design remained on him, even after he'd molded to his own body. His old decals were gone, so he could only imagine what was going on with the internal machinery. He knew he hadn't reproduced his internal quantum mirrors perfectly. He couldn't even stop his newly returned heart from going berserk.

Another black pillar emerged from the giant's left hand. He combined the pillars together and equipped himself with a shield and halberd.

"What?!"

Shinji gasped. The black giant was suddenly right in front of his face. He maintained his neutral posture, and the terrain behind him lay undisturbed.

Could he be warping somehow?

Super Eva reacted to the tip of the halberd by blocking it with the SRL Magorox. Both weapons had been reinforced with A.T. Fields, which oxidized to create sparks in space.

This was the being who'd come into the world when the Human Instrumentality Project had failed.

"Armaros!"

The name was Nerv Japan's designation for the giant who was even stronger than Evas. No one knew his actual name.

"Damn it!"

Shinji let his field explode and somehow managed to push

Armaros and the surrounding rocks away. The tremendous power pumping through his body was spiraling out of control. The heart, which had forgotten the rhythm of its own pulse, kept pushing energy through the hyperdimensional window into Super Eva. Particles seeped out of his every pore, igniting even his restraint armor.

Maya's going to yell at me again…

Also, what happened to the Q.R. Signum in my chest?

Chapter 37:
The Old Central Dogma

"I SUPPOSE SHINJI is doing something that will upset me." Maya smirked. Shinji's thoughts reached all the way down to the underground laboratory set up in the former Central Dogma, and everyone present had heard him loud and clear.

The Q.R. Signum, the only remnant of Super Eva's salinization, vibrated underwater. The black scale produced soundwaves that sounded exactly like Shinji's voice.

Toji threw the door open and made a beeline for the experimental tank. He yelled at the Q.R. Signum, which was now forming ripples on the surface of the ultrapure water.

"Shinji! Your Q.R. Signum is right here! Where are you?!"

Toji felt stupid for yelling at a glorified aquarium. But the black scale reacted to his voice, and its red veins glowed hazily in the water.

<<Toji? No, that's not possible…>>

"It's workin', y'all!" Toji's excitement was palpable. He turned to Maya and saw her shocked expression behind the blast-proof glass. The look stayed on her face for a second before she replaced it with her serious mask. "It's possible, man! It's your buddy, Toji! Shinji, where are you?!"

<<Is it really you? I'm on a planetoid somewhere between Earth and the moon… Six? What's Yomotsu Hirasaka?>>

"She means Yomotsu Hirasaka… Wait, what?!"

The underground complex was sealed off from the surface, and they had yet to receive a single communique on recent happenings. Toji now had confirmation that little Rei Six was alive and well.

"Thank God… You and Six are all right?"

<<Toji, listen!>> Shinji didn't have the luxury of enjoying their tearful reunion. <<There's no time. I'm probably going to trigger the Third Impact.>>

Toji shuddered, though he wasn't surprised. The data that looked

like a waterfall had warned him of this outcome.

<<Asuka is with me. She's still an Eva but she's no longer a Torwächter. I'm going to get her out of here.>>

Their joyful reunion had turned into a bitter farewell. Maya was already analyzing the situation when she noticed Toji flailing his arms about. She looked to the perimeter of the experimental area, which was a little hard to see past the field produced by the cone around them. But she noticed the figure walking around the facility that Lilith had so neatly cut out.

"Asuka!"

She was walking around, admiring the works, her hands folded behind her back.

She's looking at the missing Chronostatic Sphere… Is this Asuka from when Lilith was still around?

Asuka's hair fluttered, despite the lack of wind. Her figure phased out of existence beyond the perimeter before the research team could analyze it with their hand scanners. The lab stirred with noise, and Maya had to switch to the industrial speakers to speak.

"Shinji-kun? Asuka is here! Is anything happening to the synthesis? Is Asuka falling apart on your side?"

<<She's slowly…melting away…>> Shinji had just noticed what was happening to her.

"What…?"

<<She's melting into space! No… Wolfpack bit her, and she was badly hurt. She couldn't stand up even after I helped her. But at least she wasn't melting…>>

The synthesis…is melting away?

The Asuka/Eva synthesis was a fusion of thousands of organic creatures. She was less Eva than she was an amalgamation, and now that amalgamation was dissolving.

"Can she no longer recognize herself?"

<<What should we do?!>>

"Shinji-kun, don't let go of her! Use Super Eva's field to bring up an image of Asuka!"

< <I can't! I'm fighting Armaros! And my body— > > The red patterns on the Q.R. Signum blinked violently as Shinji's distant voice echoed in the underground laboratory of Hakone.

Chapter 38:
Shinji

SHINJI DEFLECTED the point of the halberd with the Magorox. The Q.R. Signums covering the black giant glowed red with every swing. The scales constantly drew on Armaros for power, no matter how far they were from him.

That was why everything that used a scale ended up being consumed by it. The scales were strong enough to power a defunct Evangelion core at the cost of mental contamination. Heurtebise and Wolfpack both took advantage of the Q.R. Signums, though they each had their own ways of dealing with its dark influence.

Super Eva and Shinji, too, had enjoyed the double-edged benefits of the Q.R. Signum. It had acted as his heart when his own heart had been stolen.

It's little more than a glorified tin can telephone now, though.

The black giant didn't seem to care that his enemies were using his powers. Shinji wondered whether Armaros even saw humans as enemies and not mere machinery to be moved about and occasionally eliminated.

Magorox's blade cut through Armaros' field, but he turned his halberd around and thrust the butt of it toward Super Eva.

No, he's going to hit Asuka!

"Gaah…!"

Shinji threw his arm around her to protect her and was immediately repaid with broken bones. Golden flames poured out of the cracks in his armor. Super Eva looked like a fountain of magma now. Even so, Shinji refused to let go of Asuka.

This is nothing!

He took the handle of the Magorox in his right hand and banged it against the Center Trigonus in his chest. He was advancing his own self-destruction by drawing more power. His left hand had gone limp, and he had to bind it with a field to prevent it from exploding.

Chapter 39:
Mutant Eva

"GO AFTER THE QUADRUPED," the Kaji-vessel ordered Ayanami Rei Quatre.

"Are you talking about Six's new Unit Zero Type-F?" Quatre asked this to annoy him, since she couldn't fight back.

"That's right. You are to reclaim the replica Longinus. The black giant doesn't know the trouble we went through to create that thing. He seems to be prioritizing the Ikari child at the moment, so this is our chance to take it."

Kaji had already abandoned this particular puppet of Ikari once before. He'd traded Trois for Quatre, since he needed some way to control the Eva. But even though he knew she was little more than a puppet, he couldn't help wondering sometimes…

What is this puppet up to?

"Go over the ridgeline. Keep a low altitude and then approach the point in a counter-clockwise fashion."

Quatre's mutant Eva spread the wings she'd taken from an Angel Carrier in the shadow of a mountain and flew. The Q.R. Signum had changed her unit significantly.

She'd initially had the same model Eva as Trois, but hers was the first of the three 0.0s that were made for space operations. Her right arm, and the gamma-ray laser cannon fused into it, had been cut off by Super Eva during the battle at the Apple's Core.

"I'm unarmed."

"You can commandeer that weapon. I don't know if you have the aptitude for it, but at least you can swing it like a blunt object."

Kaji pointed his chin toward Azumaterasu. Shinji had cast it aside before he awakened. Quatre walked over to it and pulled it out of the ground with her remaining hand.

"I can't observe its power flow…but the material strength is quite high. What's wrong?"

Kaji wrinkled his forehead. “I’ve seen this bow before…but it looks different somehow…”

The mutant Eva maintained its low altitude, though it wavered from time to time. The bow was far taller than it was and far too heavy to carry with one arm.

“I’ll fill the plug with LCL if we’re fighting.”

Chapter 40:
Apostate's Bow

THE SAHAQUIEL ANGEL CARRIER was still pursuing Six. Its fingertips grew longer and longer out of hands that were too big for its body. Six shot it down with the Powered 8 railgun. She wasn't part of the Yomotsu Hirasaka mission. This was her reason for conserving as much energy as she could during her encounters. She ran from the Angel Carriers and had only come out of hiding when a full blast from Trois had decimated one of the Sahaquiel Carrier's arms.

"Time for me to fight back!"

She closed in on her enemy while unloading the rest of her magazine into it. By the time she was close enough, the Field Piercer that was mounted on the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's right wing was fully charged. The Angel's Backbone was ready to fire. She aimed it at the center of Sahaquiel's remaining hand, which had a pattern curiously similar to a bullseye, and let loose.

"Is it over?"

Rei Six suddenly noticed the mutant Eva lurking behind her.

"Quatre?! What are you doing here?"

Quatre had been confident that she would pass by unnoticed, so the sudden mention of her name startled her.

It's those sensors on Super Eva's shoulder pylons!

Sahaquiel's large but thin hand lost the ability to support itself once it was split apart, and all one thousand meters of the membrane cast a shadow over Six's unit as it fell across her like a blanket.

"Whoa."

The membrane contracted like a muscle as soon as it made contact with Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica. Once she was locked in place, the Angel Carrier stabbed through Sahaquiel's palm, right into Six, with its staff weapon.

Six spoke from inside the membrane.

"I've been looking for you. You always hid behind the hands—"

Sahaquiel's fingers tightened around Six's neck, making a grotesque *teru teru bozu*. The tip of the Carrier's staff slid through the membrane, but it stopped just before it touched Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's chest. Six was holding a prog knife in her left hand, and her A.T. Field was shielding her.

The ring, which was made of tessellating blocks, expanded around Eva-0.0 to keep it from strangling to death. It cut off bits of Sahaquiel's hand and slithered like a snake, finally piercing the Q.R. Signum on the Carrier's left shoulder with its bayonet.

This was the barrel of the Angel's Backbone. The total length of the firing system wasn't much different from the previous model, but the barrel was now made of the spine of discarded Eva-00s, making it three times longer than the prototype.

The longer barrel resulted in an increase in initial baryon velocity, while also increasing the A.T. Field's penetration and stretching capabilities. When removed from its sleeve, the barrel could move like it had a mind of its own.

Compared to its previous model, which mainly focused on long-range support, the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was equipped with gear that made it more mobile and more capable of handling close-quarters combat.

"Phew!"

Six picked up the replica lance from the ground and stowed it away in her left pylon.

"That girl's Eva is ridiculously strong." Quatre gave Kaji her honest assessment.

"All right. We'll have to try activating this bow with the Q.R. Signum."

Quatre wasn't pleased. Every time she tapped into the Q.R. Signum for power, she was forced to look at Armaros' darkness, and it hurt every time.

"…!"

But what she saw this time wasn't the usual dark. Countless Evas were killing each other in a valley. This vision was a first for her, but she'd seen the result of this battle not so long ago.

Rock formations that look like a forest of petrified colossi. A place where the horrors of the past seem to be frozen in the present. North Africa…the Valley of Human Bodies.

And the giant standing tall at the end of the battle was—

"It's working," the Kaji-vessel's voice jolted her back to reality.

Quatre looked at the display. "Power flow confirmed. Syncing with FCS."

Immediately, the energy readings spiked, sucking them, and the soul of the Eva, into it.

Six saw Quatre's unit on course for an attack.

"I'm warning you, Quatre! I see you as hostile! I *will* fight back! And I'm really strong!"

Six bragged as she readied the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica for battle. The Angel's Backbone was already charging again.

"What is this bow…?!"

Quatre couldn't let go of the great bow, but neither could she stop it. Azumaterasu drew energy from everything…from the mutant Eva to her own mental energy.

My consciousness is fading.

They were going through the same thing Super Eva had when he'd first shot the bow from Hakone.

"This bow…it's Sacrilegus! Where did they find it?! Puppet, attach it to the ground and open a tunnel!"

"She'll get me if I stop!"

The battle had already begun.

"If you don't stop…" The weapon was so fearsome that even Seele was afraid. "If you don't stop, the bow will drain us of all our energy! Do you *want* to be a pillar of salt?!"

The mutant Eva hesitated.

<<Gotcha!>> Six fired the Angel's Backbone at them.

The baryons wrapped in a thin penetrating A.T. Field grazed the

mutant Eva's shoulder and burned a bit of its head.

"Urgh!"

Quatre had bought some time before Six could fire again. She jumped back and stabbed the point of the great bow's lower limb into the ground. She felt it let go of her as it formed a warp gate beneath it. However, Quatre couldn't draw the bowstring. She only had one hand, and that was currently keeping the bow steady.

"Picture your right hand in your mind. Just don't hit the lance!"

She took Kaji's advice, and suddenly the mutant Eva was pulling the bow back with its right arm. Quatre arched her back in her seat to compensate for the feedback she felt.

"It's so heavy!"

Too heavy. This bow wasn't made for Evas but for something much larger.

Three points of light lined up above and below the bow's grip and formed an arrow.

"Fire!"

Quatre felt something shoot up from the ground and out through the bow. Six dodged, but the mountain behind her where Wolfpack had been crucified was blown to smithereens.

This is…

"A weapon that draws power from the tunnel complex itself. Is this another tool of the Human Instrumentality Project? Or is it one of yours?"

The mutant Eva let go of the bow and took a step back. The ground beneath Azumaterasu cracked, seeping hot gas out of the fissures. The Kaji-vessel also reeled at the bow's display of power.

"This weapon is not one of the mythmakers. This is not something we are supposed to touch. This is…"

The Q.R. Signum in the mutant Eva's chest suddenly shook. Quatre translated for the black giant's scale.

"That…is mine."

"I figured," she finished.

The Kaji-vessel nodded in understanding.

Shinji saw the arrow and recognized it as the same light that had enveloped him. He sensed the mutant Eva's presence.

"Quatre! And Kaji-san's with you?"

Armaros charged toward Super Eva as the latter was focused on the bolt of light.

"Crap!"

But the attack never came. The black giant had switched targets and was now flying toward Azumaterasu.

What did he say before?

<<That…is mine.>>

Shinji heard the black giant's words even as Six softly repeated them.

<<That's my bow.>>

"What are you talking about?!"

Shinji's surprise was mixed with anger, not only at his heart, which was now going berserk, but also at the voice Armaros had chosen to speak with him.

The voice was his own.

Chapter 41:
Mari

WOLFPACK AWOKE after Azumaterasu's bolt had blown the cliffside to bits. Mari was still breathing, perhaps because the spear had missed the U.S. Eva's core, or because Wolfpack had consumed so much of Asuka's organic data.

However, the symbols of the tree of life remained on the Eva beast, unlike everything caught in Azumaterasu's firing line. The debris was already starting to disappear. Wolfpack could feel itself sliding into that zone, however. It flailed and struggled, but it couldn't break free.

"Hrrrr!" Mari growled. Ramiel's particle accelerator ring around her waist began expanding. "Raaargh!"

Using that ring of light, Wolfpack somehow managed to break free, despite the lower half of its body still being nailed to the tree of life.

Mari directed as much power to her arms as possible. She kicked aside the debris flying at her and jumped away from the desolate space.

She hadn't yet finished what she'd come here to do.

Chapter 42:
Armaros

SHINJI CHASED AFTER the black giant with the Asuka/Eva synthesis over his shoulder. He couldn't let Armaros have the bow—he knew all too well what it was capable of. But as he gave chase, a crackling noise buzzed in his ear. It was a form of feedback he'd started hearing after Armaros had spoken to him in his own voice.

<<I am…>>

It didn't sound like the words of a prophecy. There was something personal this time.

<<Why are you talking in Shinji's voice?!>> Six complained.

Shinji had always supposed that Armaros didn't have a voice and that he transmitted his thoughts directly into the people he possessed. But now Six was hearing Armaros in Shinji's voice, too.

"Don't be fooled. He's not me."

<<I know that, but…!>>

<<Kzzt…command…respond…>>

Is he sampling voices now?

Was the giant confused? No, he couldn't be. He didn't see humans as individuals. He shouldn't, anyway.

Super Eva circled in front of the giant as it sped toward the abandoned Azumaterasu. He backflipped to kick the great bow away and stopped Armaros' hand with the Magorox.

I can't cut through him!

Armaros swung the halberd in his left hand at Super Eva. Six laid down suppressing fire and asked, <<Do you want me to get the bow?>>

"Don't touch it. We don't know what's going to happen if you do!"

Shinji heard the giant's voice again as he responded to Six.

<<Kzzt…currently engaging Eva-like target…subjects are armed…the appearance of Units One and Zero in their phyllosoma

state…>>

Is he talking about us?

Six offered her analysis. <<He's speaking through different frequencies, and he's changing them every time he talks. The A.I. guesses that the frequencies he's running are at base twenty.>>

<<Sssh…what's going on…I can see Terra and Luna! Misato-san, please respond!>>

Upon hearing the last transmission, Six whispered to herself, <<This 'Shinji' doesn't know where he is.>>

Armaros stood up after Six's high-speed railgun ionized his field. He lifted his halberd overhead and spun it. The tip of his spear glowed, leaving afterimages in the void, thirty-six in total.

<<What's he doing now?>>

Halberd heads flew out in all directions, with Armaros at their epicenter. They broke the boulders surrounding him, kicking up a dust cloud big enough to cover the giant.

"Six, are you okay?!"

<<One of them grazed my left hind leg! It was shielded, too! Second volley incoming!>>

Six's voice broke through the feedback before another wave of shining spears rained down on them. Super Eva could only block the spear tips with his sword. He spoke to the still-motionless Asuka/Eva synthesis on his back. "Stay down, Asuka! Watch for stray bullets!"

Shinji was checking to make sure that she was in position when he noticed a menacing shadow fall over her. Fangs sank into her long neck. Claws bit into her shoulders.

"…!"

Wolfpack, now only an upper torso, attacked. They'd all been distracted by Armaros' omnidirectional assault. Six had had no time to use her special senses, and Shinji hadn't detected any anomalies until it was too late. Time felt like it had slowed to a crawl as Asuka's body fell forward into the exploding debris.

"Ah… Aaah!"

Shinji could barely scream. His throat was a desert.

Wolfpack, now only an upper torso, attacked.

Red life particles dispersed around him. If the excess organic data left Asuka's body, she had a chance of returning to her normal self. But she'd been in this state for too long. Wolfpack had disrupted her stabilized form, and now her balance came crashing down like a tower that tried to reach heaven.

The Asuka/Eva synthesis fell to the ground, but it was no longer a solitary unit, having lost all boundaries within itself. It broke into tiny particles, but the particles themselves remained suspended in the air, as if being held there by something.

"Aaaaah!!!"

Super Eva desperately tried to gather every last bit of it into his arms.

<<Mari!>>

Six finally noticed the ambush when she heard Shinji scream. Asuka had broken to pieces. Now, Wolfpack's upper torso seemed to suffer the same fate. It couldn't contain all of that massive organic data, probably because only half of it was left to digest it.

Perhaps this was the culmination of Mari's ambition. She seemed to stare at Six one last time before the silhouette of the wolf dissolved into a million particles.

<<You really ate Asuka, Mari. You're like a moth covered in flames.>>

"Ugh… Aaah… Waaaaaargh!"

The scream seemed to shake the ground itself. Super Eva turned around and spread his flaming wings of light.

<<Whoa!>>

Six and Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica were blown away by that single motion, and it seemed as if the island in outer space began to wobble. His wings extended around Yomotsu Hirasaka until they blew away the mountain line in the far distance.

"Aaaargh! Aaaaaaah!"

Shinji's screaming echoed across the entire moon slab.

<<Shinji! Ikari-kun! Come on, can't you hear me? What should I do?! Trois! Quatre! Anybody! Help!>>

Little Ayanami Rei Six knew she was in trouble.

Back on Hakone, Toji and Maya had heard a voice when the Q.R. Signum suddenly began to resonate at high frequencies.

“It’s at max potential!”

“Shinji!”

From the command center, Misato watched his wings grow around the landscape through the lens in the sky.

“Shinji-kun!” She clutched the cross that was her parents’ keepsake. The curtains to the Third Impact had opened.

“Anomaly on Yomotsu Hirasaka!”

“Yes, we can see that!”

Fuyutsuki snapped at Hyuga, but the operator continued.

“No, Yomotsu Hirasaka is disappearing…starting from the side facing the lens!”

“It’s what?!”

“Damn it, it’s already begun!”

Kaji clicked his tongue as the plug rattled around him. Quatre’s mutant Eva-0.0 had lost sight of Six’s unit, and with it, the replica Lance of Longinus. Quatre looked for its silhouette as the wings of light circled them. Another pair of wings had sprouted from Super Eva, and it seemed like they were about to be caught in the blast as it pierced the boulders around them.

Waves tore through the landscape like a storm. Quatre ducked into the shadow of a mountain and caught a glimpse of Armaros amid the calamity. He picked up Azumaterasu and set it upright. The great bow fit perfectly in his hand.

And still the giant remained distressed.

<<Kzzt…Nerv command…respond…>>

He spoke in Shinji’s voice, sounding as if he were lost.

“Am I supposed to call the black giant Ikari-kun now?” asked

Quatre.

“Only until the stabilizers return.”

“Stabilizers…?”

A pair of shoots suddenly sprouted out of Armaros’ back. They looked like the obsidian plates he’d had before, and they plunged into the ground. Then, two black cranes emerged from the ground in front of Armaros. They looked like they’d been wrapped in black tape, and it began to unravel, starting from their beaks. Soon, two suits of black armor stood in their place.

“Are those Torwächters?!”

Was this how they were made? Were the Torwächters the stabilizers Kaji had spoken of? They stood in front of him, but Armaros didn’t look the least bit stabilized. He reached over to one of the Torwächters with his right hand and started strangling it. The Torwächter didn’t resist. It let him do as he pleased. The black messenger spoke in a voice that sounded like a deteriorated recording.

< <Become one with me… > >

Quatre recognized the voice. “Why…?!”

“Why? Because it is *your* voice, puppet.” The Kaji-vessel mercilessly answered her question.

“Why am I hearing it?!”

“Keep watching.”

The other Torwächter took a step toward Armaros. This one spoke in Asuka’s voice.

< <Become one with me… > >

The voice was almost lost in the static, but there was no doubt about who it belonged to.

“Now do you understand?” asked Kaji.

“No.”

Kaji scoffed and shrugged. “I really hoped you would. This is what a man’s mind is like. Give him tens of thousands of years in between, and he would still prefer to hear your voices over all the rest.”

For a moment, she saw him smile as Kaji instead of Seele.

“The Valley of Human Bodies belonged to a world where

countless Evas fought each other. You and Asuka died before the battle took place. Those messengers are mere shadows of your souls, but the black giant is still soothed by your voices."

Which meant…what?

"Armaros was the last man standing."

He's the Ikari-kun of that world…

And yet there was an inconsistency. As a conspirator, was Seele unable to go to the next world himself?

With the two Torwächters supporting Armaros on either side, the three giants began sinking into the ground, escaping the floating island as it was being incinerated.

"With that, the personality of the other Shinji will return to his long slumber, allowing him to faithfully carry out his duty."

Quatre hit the comms button. "Six, wherever you are, throw the replica lance toward Earth when things start going bad."

"What do you think you're—" the Kaji-vessel began.

"We can't afford to lose the center of the impact, can we?" Quatre said. "We need to make plans to retrieve it. We should still be able to calculate the tide right now…"

The images on her virtual display were the beginnings of Shinji's Third Impact. Yomotsu Hirasaka was being pummeled by a myriad of waves—electromagnetic, radiational, gravitational.

"Besides…" Quatre continued.

As the mountains of Yomotsu Hirasaka continued to be decimated, the lens beyond became more visible. The Kaji-vessel furrowed his eyebrows as he got a better look at their surroundings.

"Hmph… I suppose."

Seele, inside him, conceded. The mutant Eva chased after Armaros, latching on to the tip of his halberd as he disappeared into the ground and warped away from the storm-stricken landmass.

Chapter 43:
Moving Anomaly

AOBA'S REPORT SEEMED insignificant compared to what was happening on the other side of the lens, but he still had to deliver it.

"Sir, if you have a moment…" he said to Fuyutsuki.

His report concerned the rising tide levels.

"The shift seems to be occurring as an extension of the straight line connecting the lens to Yomotsu Hirasaka."

The tide was moving toward Japan. Although, if one were to consider its position on the shrinking Earth from the other side of the lens, Japan was moving toward the tide.

Nothing good could come of this.

"Contact Trois and let her know what's happening."

Chapter 44:
Convergence

BACK ON EARTH'S SIDE of the lens, Trois was hunched over the center console of Eva-0.0 after a violent pain had assaulted her chest.

Pain…? No. Heat?

She remembered the sensation from when Six had focused sunlight on her palm with a magnifying glass as a joke. It was the same feeling, only thousands of times more intense. Trois didn't realize that she'd opened the zipper of her plugsuit. It wasn't just the heat, either. She could feel a presence inside her.

It's the suit. Something is entering the suit!

At first, she thought she'd imagined it, but then she saw light gathering inside of the suit.

"The orichalcum fabric is…glowing?!" The material wasn't supposed to have luminescent properties, and Trois quickly took the rest of it off. She stripped in the LCL and kicked the suit out from under her feet.

Red particles started emerging from her virtual display, as if they'd been waiting for this moment. Was this real or a system error? The light within the suit had become too bright for her to see. Back on Earth, the figure had stepped around Trois' body to look at Lilith's Sphere. She'd then taken Trois by the hand and dragged her to a shopping mall.

Trois smiled at the memory.

"Asuka is coming into herself…"

The suit, which had been originally created as part of the abandoned Asuka salvage mission, was capable of recreating her physical features. It had been fluttering in the LCL, and now pulled itself taut as a slender figure filled the inside of it. Locks of golden hair formed above the collar, blowing wind into the LCL.

Trois reached out her arms to catch the figure and felt resistance. The suit had weight. It was heavy. As she pulled Asuka into her, she noticed the little girl in her arms. Trois had seen her face before.

Mari…? But I thought she had ears on her head like an animal…

"This is Trois to Hakone command…"

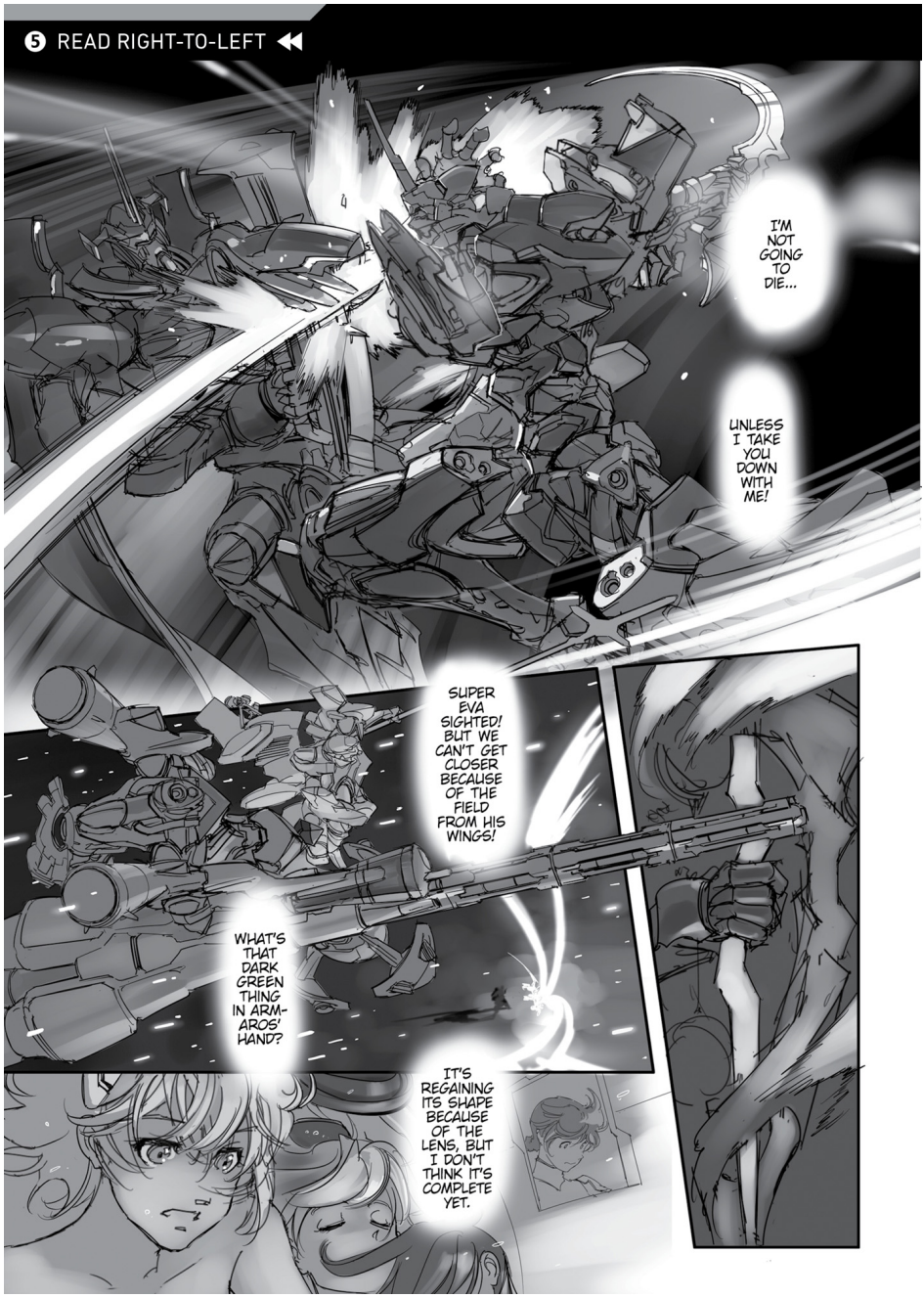
She contacted Nerv Japan, whose orders she'd disobeyed.

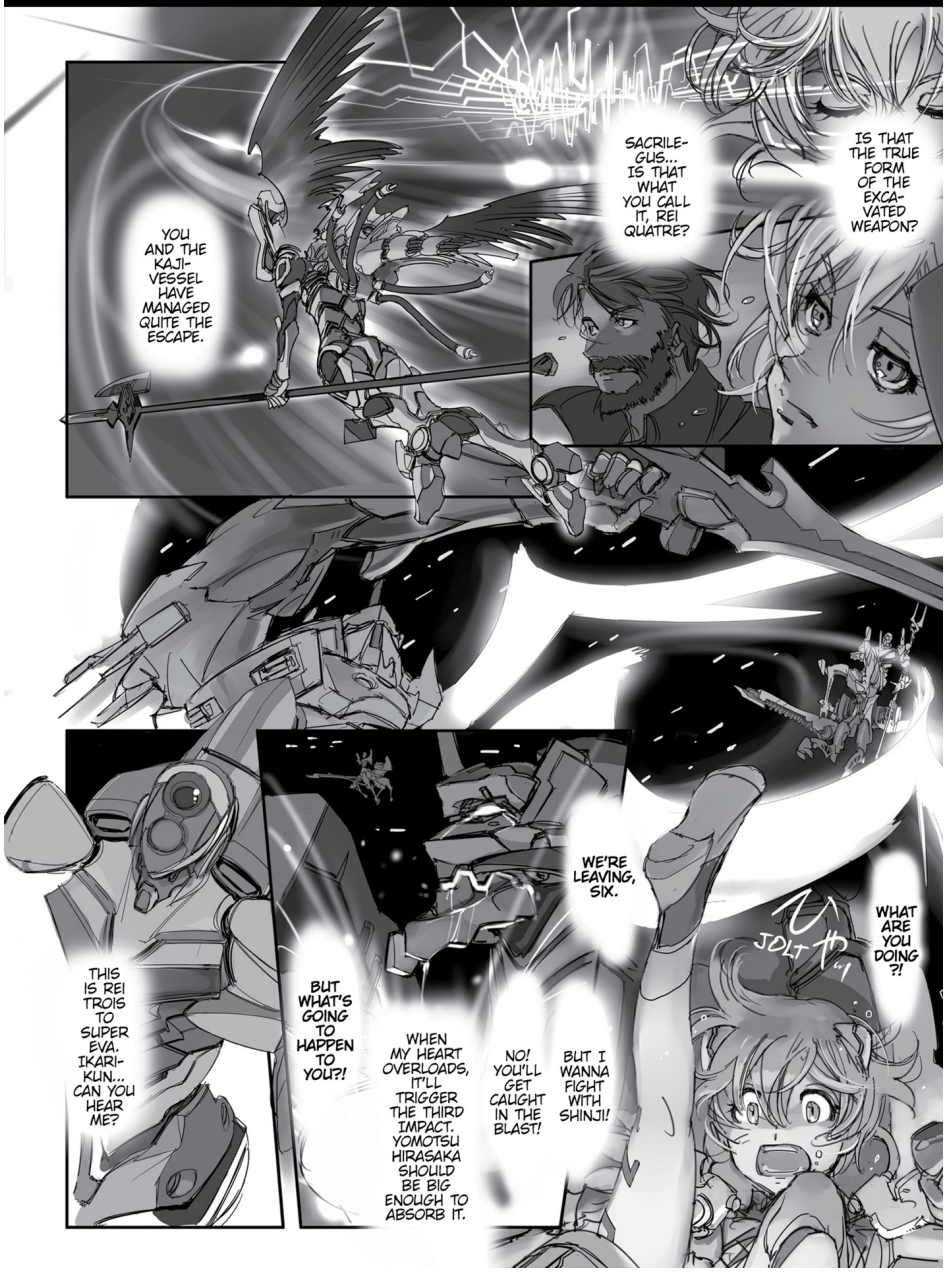
"Organic body of Nerv Japan Eva pilot Soryu Asuka Langley is forming within the experimental orichalcum plugsuit. Currently situated in front of the lens's focal convergence point. Someone else also regenerated with the subject, but both vitals are stable. Awaiting further commands."

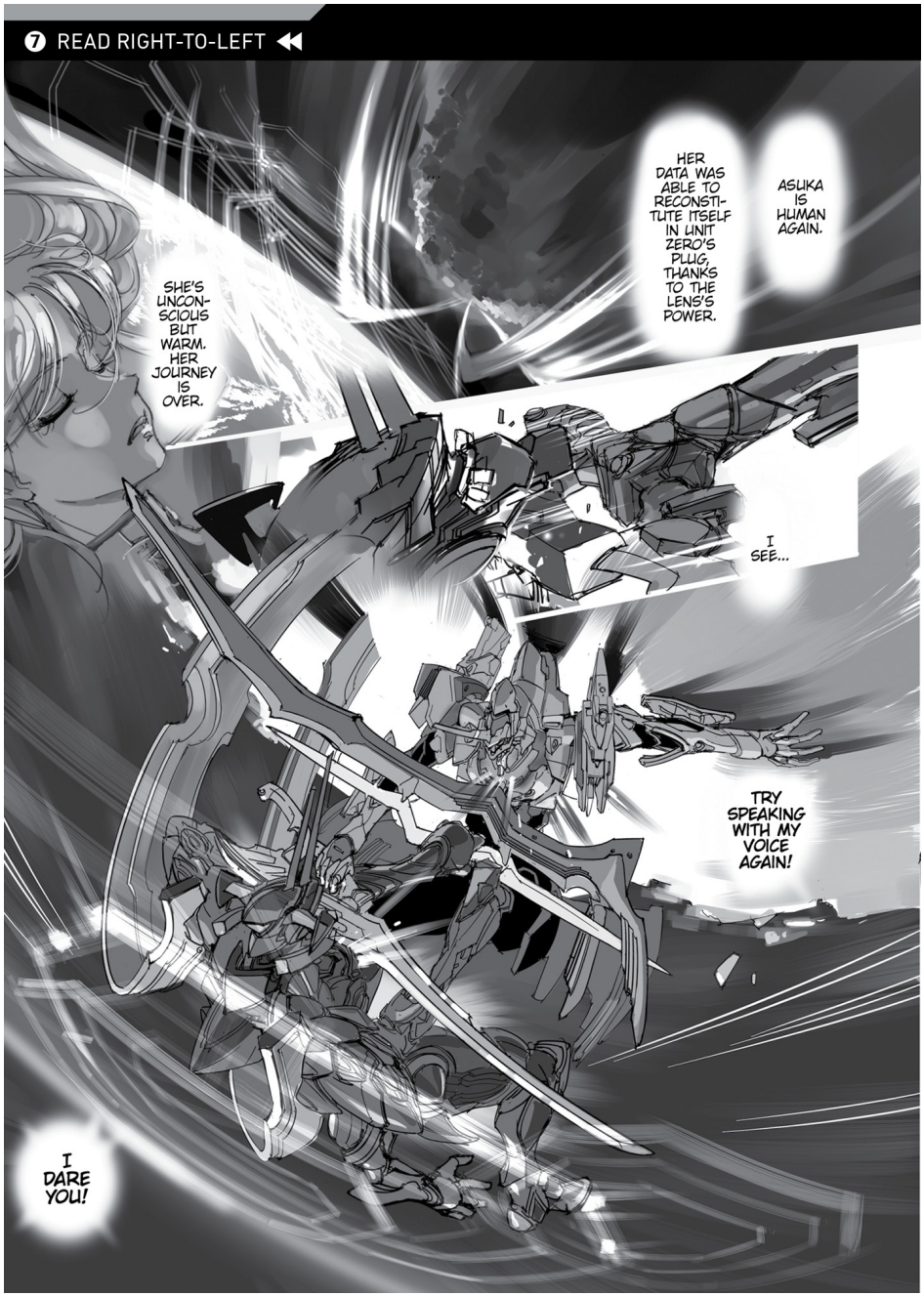
AYA-NAMI-SAN!
IS ASUKA REALLY BACK?!
WHAT IS GOING ON...?
THAT'S 100,000 KILO-METERS AWAY FROM YOMOTSU HIRA-SAKA.
BUT IF ASUKA IS CONVERGING ON THIS SIDE OF THE SPATIAL LENS...
THAT MEANS THAT WHATEVER MARI COULDN'T DIGEST WILL CONVERGE HERE, TOO.
WE CAN'T STAY HERE!

YOMOTSU HIRASAKA!
IT'S OVER! THE LANDMASS IS GOING TO CRASH INTO EARTH!
AS IF THAT THING WASN'T ENOUGH OF A PROBLEM...
IT HAD TO BRING THE THIRD IMPACT ALONG WITH IT!
SHINJI! IKARI-KUN, PLEASE RESPOND!
BLUE...
WHERE HAVE I SEEN THAT BLUE BEFORE ...?
THE SKY?!
WHAT'S THE SKY DOING IN SPACE ?!
THAT'S THE LENS!
THAT PIECE OF THE MOON HAS BEEN REDUCED TO FRAG-MENTS.
THE PIECES ARE CON-VERGING BEFORE EARTH!
AND NOW IT'S FOCUS-ING THE SUN-LIGHT!

READ RIGHT-TO-LEFT 4
WHAT ?!
HE'S GONE. SLIPPED OUT THROUGH A WARP GATE.
WHAT HAPPENED TO ARM-AROS?!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. I THINK I WAS FIGHTING AN ENEMY...
OH, NO YOU DON'T!
HE YANKED ARMAROS OUT OF THE WARP GATE?!
YOU STARTED ALL THIS!


5 READ RIGHT-TO-LEFT
I'M NOT GOING TO DIE...
UNLESS I TAKE YOU DOWN WITH ME!
SUPER EVA SIGHTED! BUT WE CAN'T GET CLOSER BECAUSE OF THE FIELD FROM HIS WINGS!
WHAT'S THAT DARK GREEN THING IN ARM-AROS' HAND?
IT'S REGAINING ITS SHAPE BECAUSE OF THE LENS, BUT I DON'T THINK IT'S COMPLETE YET.


YOU AND THE KAJI-VESSEL HAVE MANAGED QUITE THE ESCAPE.
SACRILE-GUS... IS THAT WHAT YOU CALL IT, REI QUATRE?
IS THAT THE TRUE FORM OF THE EXCA-VATED WEAPON?
THIS IS REI TROIS TO SUPER EVA. IKARI-KUN... CAN YOU HEAR ME?
BUT WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO YOU?!
WHEN MY HEART OVERLOADS, IT'LL TRIGGER THE THIRD IMPACT. YOMOTSU HIRASAKA SHOULD BE BIG ENOUGH TO ABSORB IT.
NO! YOU'LL GET CAUGHT IN THE BLAST!
BUT I WANNA FIGHT WITH SHINJI!
WE'RE LEAVING, SIX.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING ?!


7 READ RIGHT-TO-LEFT
ASUKA IS HUMAN AGAIN.
HER DATA WAS ABLE TO RECONSTI-TUTE ITSELF IN UNIT ZERO'S PLUG. THANKS TO THE LENS'S POWER.
SHE'S UNCON-SCIOUS BUT WARM. HER JOURNEY IS OVER.
I SEE...
TRY SPEAKING WITH MY VOICE AGAIN!
I DARE YOU!

8 READ RIGHT-TO-LEFT

PART 7

NEON GENESIS

COLLISION COURSE

EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 45:
Nerv Japan Hakone

MISATO FORCED HER WAY through the pandemonium to get to the balcony. She grabbed a pair of binoculars from a sentry posted there and looked through them.

The dark shadow of Yomotsu Hirasaka was peeking through the clouds beyond the mountain range in the distance. Beneath it, a giant being of light held the landmass on his back. Neither had breached the atmosphere so far.

The mere sight of it was enough to throw anyone into a panic.

"It's huge…but…"

Even amid the confusion, the scene sparked dread in the sole survivor of the Second Impact. Aside from its Eva-like silhouette, the being she observed was only vaguely humanoid. But what was it, *really?* She couldn't tell whether it was Super Eva as Shinji's other body or that Shinji had become the giant himself.

Shinji-kun, are you still in there somehow…?

"W-we're done for!" one of the younger security personnel was running around madly. They didn't know whether to fear the being of light or to trust it.

In any case, it was clear that humanity was out of options. Neither the Aten's Hammer or the ballistically propelled N_2 warhead Iphiclus Javelin could stop the descent of the lunar landmass.

The wind was strong. A strange tide moved in from the southeast. There was a rumbling in the air as fighter jets cut across the sky from Mount Daikan Airport. They were headed south, where the object was supposed to have fallen.

"Attention, citizens of Tokyo-3. Evacuate to the shelter areas immediately. We are looking into appropriate anti-Angel measures for the occasion. Please await further orders. All personnel, to your stations."

Aoba broadcast Misato's orders through the intercom. In all honesty, if Yomotsu Hirasaka crashed into the Earth at its current speed, no underground shelter would be safe. The landmass would rupture the Earth's mantle and turn it inside out.

Still, evacuation was the best Misato could do for the citizens of Tokyo-3. She bit her lip and continued staring at the screen as memories of the giant of light who'd taken everything she held dear played in her head. That giant had been faceless, but this one…

You're in there, Shinji-kun. Give me that much, at least.

Chapter 46:
Yomotsu Hirasaka

SHINJI WAS BARELY holding on to his thoughts, which seemed to expand as much as his body.

Oooorgh!

He roared as he braced against Yomotsu Hirasaka. The two-hundred-kilometer-wide basalt and feldspar formation was on his back. Super Eva had become a giant of light after triggering the Third Impact. He spread his wings to support the whole of the detached lunar landmass in an attempt to slow its descent to Earth.

< <Kzzt…Ikari-kun…I'm beginning my approach. > >

Ayanami Rei Trois spoke through the harsh feedback. Yet he heard her voice as clearly as if with his physical ears.

< <Yomotsu Hirasaka is still acting on the moon's orbit, so you have to push it east against the equator. That's where it's headed. If it accelerates any further… > >

He tried changing the position of his wings, but this failed to affect the rock in any significant manner. There was too much mass for him to stop, let alone move.

Yomotsu Hirasaka had appeared on the far side of the moon from where the spatial lens was positioned. Now it was closing in on the Earth's crust at twenty kilometers per second.

Shinji attempted to slow the rock's descent by cutting away chunks of it with well-placed A.T. Fields. He growled. There seemed to be no end of Yomotsu Hirasaka, no matter how many fields he produced.

Just stop!

He couldn't let it land there. The Eurasian continent was wrapped in the darkness of night, while the Japanese archipelago was tinted orange to the east. His homeland was witnessing a beautiful sunset at this very moment. He imagined the bedrock attached to his back growing a mind of its own, and it felt as if it was specifically targeting everything he held dear.

Don't come any closer, Trois! Asuka's still with you…and I don't have much time left!

During the Second Impact, records stated that when the giant of light had appeared, the mere pressure had engulfed everything within a four-thousand-kilometer radius, annihilating over half of the Earth.

Now Shinji was waiting to *initiate* the third rendition, instead of preventing it. The event was inevitable, so he thought he might as well take advantage of the power.

The heart of Super Eva, the giant of light, continued pouring out blazing particles as it drew closer to its breaking point.

If Yomotsu Hirasaka fell upon the Earth, and the Third Impact followed, it would truly be the end of the world. Given how small the Earth had gotten, it might actually split in two. Shinji's plan was to use the force of the Impact to destroy the lunar landmass, or at least change its trajectory.

He continued chipping away at Yomotsu Hirasaka with his powerful A.T. Fields. He felt the violent feedback in his arms every time one of his fields broke. The loss of energy slammed into him like a brick wall.

The spatial lens had spectralized Yomotsu Hirasaka, which had been on the other side of the moon, and converged it right over the Earth. The lunar landmass was originally only supposed to graze the planet, but now it was on a collision course with it.

The spatial lens wasn't all bad, however. It spectralized and converged everything on Yomotsu Hirasaka, including Asuka, who was falling apart on a particle level, and Mari, who had literally bitten off more data than she could chew.

Trois said Asuka is human again, and I believed her without a second thought…

No… If anything, I'm using Asuka's return as an excuse to do what I'm doing now.

He made up his mind and stopped worrying about his plans.

Yomotsu Hirasaka was supported by the giant of light, Shinji, and

the wings that had sprouted from his back. He extended his A.T. Field at an angle toward the Earth in an attempt to change the course of the two-hundred-kilometer-wide mass of rock.

The giant of light had suppressed the Armaros under the fringes of his field. Now the fields were falling apart, and Shinji could only focus on repairing the ones in front of him. In the chaos of light and tremors, the black giant revealed that he was still alive.

Armaros appeared, looking for his great bow. The weapon, excavated by Maya's team from the bottom of Lake Ashi, had originally belonged to him.

Stay still, Brother! I'll be done with this soon enough!

"Brother" was what Shinji called the giant who shared his voice. Although, now that Super Eva had become a giant of light, Armaros looked like a toy in comparison. Super Eva flapped one of his gargantuan wings and held down Armaros' left arm as it reached for his bow.

But no one could have foreseen what happened next.

<<Shinji, behind you!>>

Six?! I thought I told you to get the lance out of here!

Behind me…?

Two dark shadows flew out of Yomotsu Hirasaka, their tails attached to the ground.

New Torwächters?!

Their broken back plates were as good as new, and each held a black spear in its hand. The black messengers raised their weapons, producing a bolt of black lightning in the space between them.

What is that?!

Shinji tried to bat the Torwächters away with his wings, but they nimbly dodged.

Gaaah!

The black lightning cut off one of Super Eva's wings, which spanned over a hundred kilometers. Stored energy exploded all the way from the stump to the tip of his wing.

Damn it!

The Torwächters were closing in for another attack when a blinding flash of light suddenly incinerated one of the their feet. Trois had fired her gamma-ray laser cannon.

“Six! Provide backup for Ikari-kun on Yomotsu Hirasaka!”

<<You got it!>>

<<I’ll help,>> Hikari said.

Heurtebise initiated its N_2 reactor-powered graviton wings and left Trois behind. Trois set a new course to approach Yomotsu Hirasaka. She was about to initiate her thrusters when alarms started ringing in Eva-0.0. Her screen was flooded with red COMMAND ERROR windows to the point that it caused her Eva to grow sluggish. A new mind had been recognized by the system, one that didn’t belong to Ayanami Rei Trois.

“Ungh…”

The eyelids of the blonde girl fluttered in the LCL-filled plug of Trois’ Eva. The system immediately shut down all fine controls of the unit and switched to the clumsy manual controls. The output of the external S^2 Engine, as well as its FCS, was now locked.

The Second Child took a slow and grumpy look at her surroundings and noticed Rei Trois’ lack of plugsuit. The first words out of Asuka’s mouth were, “Why are you naked?”

“Because I gave you my plugsuit.”

“Did you…? Nice hair, by the way.” Asuka played with the ends of Trois’ hair, which now reached to the nape of her neck. Her hair transitioned beautifully from aqua to black.

“Thank you. I’m quite proud of it. We’ll have to make today an anniversary.”

Asuka was still half-dazed, having just recovered her human form, but she looked at Trois with surprise. “I’ve never heard you say anything so cocky in my life. I don’t hate it.”

“The girl. Why is she here?” Trois asked while fiddling with the manual controls. Asuka looked down into her arms and finally noticed the sleeping girl. She raised her eyebrows as if to say, “Oh, right. Her.”

When Asuka had been reconstituted out of thin air by converging light particles, she’d brought Mari along with her.

“She was really annoying, saying how she wanted to be part of my

team. She pissed me off so much I thought I'd drag her here so she could see what being around me is *really* like."

<<Trois! Stay on course!>> Six called from the Pegasus that was the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica. <<I'm sending something your way. Make sure you get it! Counting down from ten.>>

"Two… One… Mark!"

There was a bang, and suddenly Trois' Eva-0.0 was holding a red spear.

"What, is that the Longinus…?!" Asuka cringed. The uniquely ominous vibrations of the lance reached even the inside of the plug.

<<Was that Asuka just now? You really did turn back into a human… Ugh.>>

"You wanna try congratulating me this time, kid?!"

<<What? Crimson A1 was so much cuter than you are.>>

Eva-0.0 looked at the spear she'd received from Six's unit.

"Six, the me who is childish and selfish, this is…!"

The replica Lance of Longinus. The very same lance that Armaros had taken and stowed away on the Apple's Core. The same lance that Shinji and Rei Quatre had flung toward Earth from the other side of the sun.

"Ikari-kun needs this right now!"

The more technologically advanced Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica was already using its compact graviton floaters to change direction.

<<Trois, the me who unifies—no. 'The me who is in love' is more like it.>> Six was now returning to the battlefield. <<Shinji told me to bring the lance back to Earth. He said it might be the key to deciding the world's fate and that we couldn't afford to lose it with him.>>

The spear was the final method of stopping an Impact. It was an instrument that appealed to an invisible logic higher than that of the tree of life. The lance was an instrument of intervention that could prevent the completion of the Human Instrumentality Project by its ability to destroy energy itself.

Lose Ikari-kun…? Is that what he's planning to do with himself?

Asuka looked at the error messages, blinking her long eyelashes and trying to figure out what was going on. She finally realized that her consciousness was interfering with Eva-0.0's systems.

"Should I go back to sleep?"

Asuka fiddled with the LCD screen embedded in the wrist of her orichalcum plugsuit. She was looking for the manual administration of anesthetics.

"What is… Look, I appreciate the new features and everything, but now I can't find the one I want!"

Trois saw her contours blur into particles again for a moment before regaining solidity. New alarms rang, indicating a near miss. The lens had reproduced chunks of Yomotsu Hirasaka, which were now on a course to Earth.

"Just stay as you are, Asuka. Trois to Hakone command. Requesting permission for the release of the FCS lock and permission to shoot freely."

Asuka's human form isn't stable yet.

Trois could still operate her gamma-ray laser even with Asuka in the plug. Hakone unlocked her FCS, and although her external N_2 reactor remained in lockdown, she began charging her cannon.

I know why Ikari-kun doesn't want to lose the spear, but I don't want to run away from this. There has to be something I can do.

"You just gotta put your mind to it."

Asuka's words startled Trois. She turned away from the giant of light Super Eva had become to face her.

"Don't see why he's trying so hard when he's that damn big…"

"Shinji's not gonna die. Not before he does something flashy." Asuka closed her eyes. She propped Mari up, still asleep, and reclined into her plug seat. "But I can almost guarantee you that he's going to mess up." Asuka relaxed, taking slow, deep breaths of the LCL. The more nervous she was, the faster her thoughts would contaminate the Eva.

"He's cute when he's like this, but don't tell him that. I like listening to all the excuses he makes when I poke him about it."

Eva-0.0 maintained its firing posture and changed its position

with its thrusters. The gamma-ray laser cannon fired silently in the darkness of space. The blast consumed a large chunk of falling debris, ionizing it instantly.

The red spear glowed in the illumination from by Trois' gun. She realized then that Armaros might call upon the original Lance of Longinus, like he had in North Africa. She looked up to see the Longinus Ring, a spider web spun around the world by the original lance, growing longer and longer.

Have our circumstances changed since then? The lance is still shrinking the Earth. Then again, it might have to do with spatial lens that transported Asuka and Yomotsu Hirasaka here…

"Is there something else the lens must do?"

Chapter 47:
Shinji's Impact

THE COORDINATED MANEUVERS of Torwächters A and B were finally broken with Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's return to the battlefield. A's left shoulder took a hit from the Angel's Backbone, forcing it to retreat.

"What are you doing back here?!" Shinji grunted painfully.

<<I'm here because you look half dead!>> Six snapped at him as she charged through Torwächter A. The black messenger kicked off Yomotsu Hirasaka to regain its balance, but Six chased it to the ground.

"Whoa."

As she jumped off Yomotsu Hirasaka, Six was startled by the rumbling of the entire structure. The beating of Super Eva's palpitating heart was sending shock waves throughout the entire rock formation.

What's going to happen to this thing…?

<<Ikari-kun, this is Horaki in the Euro Eva.>>

Horaki-san's here, too? I told you to go… Toji can see…

<<Hikari? Are you there?>>

<<Toji?>>

How was she hearing him? Hikari felt the Field Piercer Devil's Backbone, along with the Q.R. Signum attached to Heurtebise, resonate.

It's the Q.R. Signum you gave me… It's still connected… At the bottom of Tokyo-3… That's where Toji is.

<<Shinji, Maya thinks you deserve a medal for not losing your personality despite turning into a giant of light. She says it's because the Q.R. Signum that tried to eat you is anchoring your existence. I agree with her—>>

The sound of breaking glass echoed in the lab set up in the old Central Dogma.

"What just happened?!"

Toji turned around and looked at the aquarium. A large crack now

ran down Shinji's Q.R. Signum as it glowed menacingly.

"But that was at maximum output!"

A's tightly woven shield dispersed the Angel's Backbone's shot into stray energy. B came in from behind it, and together they formed a black bolt that almost sliced through the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's waist.

"Six! Stop being reckless and listen!"

The battle on Yomotsu Hirasaka was observable by telescope from the Hakone command center. The image on the main screen was distorted, however, mainly by the A.T. Fields Super Eva was continuously putting out.

"These Torwächters form a lightning bolt between them that they use to cut down their enemies. Take care that the other one doesn't come at you from behind, even when you're just dealing with one."

Six finally listened to Misato after almost falling victim to the Torwächters' attack. "So, what should I do?"

<<Kzzt…pincer formation. Give them a taste of their own medicine. You should have the communication protocol from the Novaya Zemlya operation, so contact the Euro Eva for help.>>

"Uhhh… This one?"

Six's virtual display was now transmitted to Heurtebise's plug. Hikari was taken aback when she saw the scribbles—Six's battle plans—drawn in crayon all over her screen, "Wh-what is this?"

Hikari was seeing the 3D map drawn inside Rei Six's head. Heurtebise's assistant A.I. struggled with the uniquely individual diagram, taking four entire seconds to process it into a map that was up to Euro Sixth standards.

"This is the child version of Ayanami-san…the Eva who was supposed to be part of the Novaya Zemlya operation. Heurtebise to Kommandobrücke. Awaiting confirmation."

<<Hikari…it's probably too late to do anything now, but you do have permission to fire the Devil's Backbone. We wouldn't want anyone to think Europe has abandoned Asia to the falling landmass. But make sure you come out of this alive after suppressing the Torwächters.>>

"I know you too well to think that you would abandon us, Herr

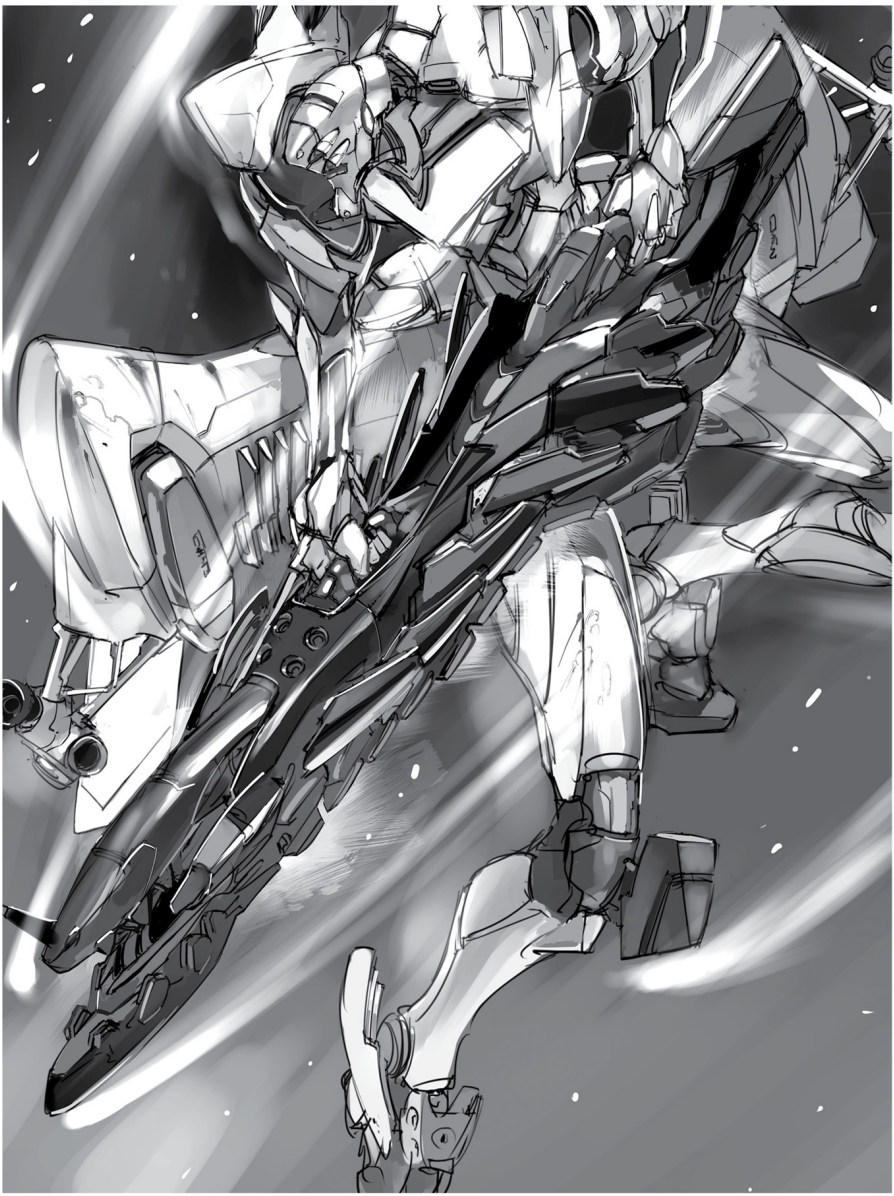
Clausewitz. Thank you, and I love you. Reactor output stable. Taking Devil's Backbone out of sleep mode. Beginning activation sequence."

The Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica had a wealth of terrain data, since it had been the first Eva on Yomotsu Hirasaka. It attracted the two Torwächters' attention and began weaving through the hills and crevices. The Torwächters attacked, and the Eva-0.0 was seemingly affected as its flight became inconsistent. It played its role as bait perfectly.

Heurtebise, the firing half of the pincer formation, drifted to Yomotsu Hirasaka on pure inertia. To avoid detection, it didn't use its graviton floaters.

Hikari didn't have time to analyze the entirety of Six's mental map. "Okay, I get it," she said to her A.I. "Cut the conversion process!" Rei's drawings were reminiscent of her little sister's. There was a happy flower on the map to indicate that the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica would be just out of firing range when the Torwächter showed its back during their next maneuver.

"Activating Devil's Backbone!"



“Activating Devil’s Backbone!”

An ominous chill ran down Six's spine. "What was that…?"

<<Have you ever cursed the day you were born?>>

Six and the other Ayanami clones had often received this question from researchers and civilians if they knew about her condition. People asked it out of good intentions as well as malice. She'd never resented her existence, though, even after she'd gained self-awareness.

But the chill that ran down her spine cursed its existence. Understandable. A spine was supposed to have hands and feet, not a rifle barrel. Perhaps it was the Q.R. Signum's power, or perhaps Euro Eva amplified whatever emotions the objects around it felt.

Either way, Six said, "Your output's too strong!"

The Torwächters had taken notice and turned around. But the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica's Angel's Backbone was now fully charged.

"Over here!" Six aimed at Torwächter A and fired. A flash of baryons shot out of the barrel at near light speed and hit her target. They failed to pierce its field, however. Torwächter A thrust its spear at Six, but she wrapped the spine's barrel in an A.T. Field and cracked it like a whip to deflect the attack.

Torwächter B was still a threat behind her, but Six moved out of the way after she felt something invisible tap her chest. If she'd remained in the same position, that invisible something would have gone right through her A.T. Field.

This was the Devil's Backbone's firing line, and Heurtebise had aimed it straight at Torwächter A. It was the same kind of weapon as Six's Angel's Backbone, but the difference in degree was unbelievable.

"Your phase contrast barrel can reach all the way here?!"

Six was shocked. Heurtebise fired. Torwächter A's body spasmed as something pierced its chest and began squirming inside its armor.

"Urgh!"

The next moment, an event horizon ripped open in Torwächter A's chest, producing a micro black hole that devoured it, blowing a powerful jet of air in the direction of the firing line, which grazed Six's head.

"Hey, watch it! You almost killed me!"

<<Six, neutralize the remaining one with your cannon!>>

Trois said.

Six's gamma-ray laser sparked as it shot through Torwächter B's shield, causing the black messenger to waver.

"I was going to!"

But B wasn't going down so easily. It rushed closer to Hikari, forcing her to engage in melee combat. She readied her halberd, realizing she'd let her guard down slightly upon seeing how badly damaged her opponent was.

B extended its spear, stabbing the white Euro Eva in its thigh.

"Aaaah!"

She fired a second shot of the Devil's Backbone as pain racked her body, but it only ended up taking off B's left arm. The Torwächter tackled Hikari. Her consciousness was growing dim.

She was knocked all the way to the front of Super Eva.

Horaki-san! Six!

Six cracked the barrel of her Angel's Backbone like a whip and latched it around Heurtebise's foot. She yanked Hikari to safety just before B could deal the killing blow with its spear. Super Eva hid Heurtebise and the Eva-0.0 under the plumes of his wing. The Torwächter B extended its remaining hand toward Armaros, who was still under Super Eva's bonds.

<<Become one with me…>>

"Huh?" Six was startled to hear a Torwächter speak.

"That's Trois' voice! No. Our voice…? It sounds like a really old recording…"

Suddenly, Armaros pushed back against Super Eva with a force greater than the giant of light's. Super Eva was many times larger than Armaros and yet…

And yet the black giant grew.

And grew.

Armaros grew to the point of breaking through the Super Eva's field, and his hand, which had been suppressed by the Magorox, brandished Azumaterasu against him.

FWUMP!

Six squealed as her Eva was blown away by a powerful wind that ripped across Yomotsu Hirasaka—powerful enough to level mountains.

The giant of light reeled as the landmass on his back shook and swayed. The black giant had broken free of his A.T. Field prison and was now running amok on the lunar landmass.

Shinji felt a great aura spread above him.

Such power!

They'd reached the thermosphere now and had twenty seconds left before they made contact with the Earth's surface.

There's no time. All this energy, and the Third Impact still isn't triggering!

The giants of light and dark fought upside down on the falling landmass, one armed with a sword and the other a great bow. *What am I missing?!*

Shinji clumsily swung his blade.

But the black giant didn't bother evading. He'd already lost one of his legs, and Super Eva's sword sliced harmlessly through empty space. Armaros maintained his posture and readied his bow.

Crap!

Azumaterasu left a trail of seven-colored light when it fired. Seele had referred to it as Sacrilegus, the Relic Thief, and this was its most powerful attack. The force that had vaporized a large portion of Yomotsu Hirasaka now pierced Shinji's heart.

It felt as if lightning had punched him in the chest. An overwhelming force wracked his body, adding to the already violent outflow of energy and incinerating his organs with a loud crackle.

Gaaaaaah!

The arrow shot through Yomotsu Hirasaka, its vast energy rocking the stage where the Human Instrumentality Project was supposed to begin. All of it poured into Super Eva.

Wait…I know what this is…

The outline maintaining Super Eva's form melted away into photons.

The Impact had begun.

Super Eva's body spread wide. His sword had followed his transformation and was now an arc of light lacking any outline. He realized that, in the distant past, the completion of the Human Instrumentality Project had probably been expedited by manipulating warp technology. Perhaps the great bow Sacrilegus had been a creation of their version of Dr. Akagi. The arc of light fell upon the great bow and split it in two, cracking Armaros' hardened field like ice.

THRUM!

The giant of light took a powerful step forward. The photon longsword ran through the black giant—the Eva-01 of the past, perhaps even the Shinji of the past.

<<Take… Eat… This is my body…>> Armaros said.

Ah…

<<Now I remember… This is what I needed…>> He spoke in Shinji's voice for the last time. Shinji felt his heart burn within him as the fire coiled around it consumed all.

I see… Of course.

He'd been fruitlessly trying to trigger the Third Impact through his own will. What he'd needed in the end was a loud voice that could overwhelm everything.

Let's do this. I can't stop the descent, but I can at least slow it down… Where should I drop it?

The people of Earth watched with bated breath as Yomotsu Hirasaka came to a stop. The three wings of light suddenly split into six, spreading and covering the entire sky.

<<Kzzzt…Kommandobrücke…Heurtebise. Hikari, get out of… Kzzzt.>>

Heurtebise was the last Eva left on Yomotsu Hirasaka as Super Eva's shock waves buffeted it. Alarms blared in the plug warned Hikari about her injuries and the extreme surface temperatures. Clausewitz's voice roused her from her daze.

"Eegh…!"

In the wave of brilliant light, the black giant unleashed his arrow,

even while pierced with a sword. Alarms continued to ring. Hikari could barely make out anything in the storm of brightness, but through the confusion she saw the giant of light fighting an enlarged Armaros.

It sent her into a panic.

Compared to them, Heurtebise looked like a child's plaything.

The warning colors in Heurtebise's entry plug shifted. The telemetry readings transmitted to the Euro control center shocked Clausewitz.

<<Kzzzt… Dial it back! She's going too deep with the dummy plug's parallel consciousness! She can't…>>

Heurtebise reached for the Devil's Backbone in its left shoulder and opened its armored louver. Rainbow-colored phase light leaked out of it.

"I'm sorry…but I'm not strong enough. I said I never wanted to go under the parallel consciousness again! But I'm just so weak…!"

In the storm of light, the white Eva had finished charging its black dragon.

"Activate!" Hikari yelled, and the cannon obeyed by opening its mouth.

She felt the recoil through her entire body, an ominous rumble.

The Field Piercer. The Devil's Backbone.

Unlike the Angel's Backbone, which used parts originally belonging to the Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica, the Devil's Backbone could have become a new Eva by itself. The spine had had its four limbs amputated, and it was now cursed to shoot powerful, consuming fields out of its mouth.

Hrgh… Huff…

New warning windows appeared. Hikari's heart rate and breathing were slowly going haywire. Her emotions exploded to the point of no longer being restrained by the dummy plug's fail-safe.

"You took her away from me…! Kodama…! Kodama!!!"

She remembered that Armaros was the reason her sister had turned into a pillar of salt.

Vengeance—was that what she wanted? Or justice? She suffered a

brief moment of clarity in all that confusion, and in it she saw the thing that was actually driving her.

Fear.

The coils that had generated the field looked like teeth at the end of the barrel. They produced a micro black hole, which moved at a blindingly fast speed.

Horaki-san… Didn't make it out?

Shinji noticed Heurtebise at his feet, which seemed so far away from him. His comment reached the old Central Dogma in Hakone.

"Shinji, please! Hikari…!" Toji yelled.

And then the cracked Q.R. Signum finally shattered into a thousand pieces.

I'll try… Just take care of the—

Shinji's voice echoed like a dream.

The giant's tidal wave of explosive light engulfed everything around it. Armaros stood his ground and maintained his aim. It looked as if he noticed Hikari for a moment, perhaps even smiling. It was an odd thing to do to someone firing a micro black hole directly at your head.

<<Hikari-chan…?>>

The next moment, Armaros' entire body was consumed, leaving only his feet. The nearly invisible black hole forced out boiling jets of light as it flew. But this was soon outshined by the light surrounding it, making it impossible to see.

An intense light focused at the center of the six wings, which grew in size, absorbing the force of Yomotsu Hirasaka. But now the heart of the giant of light was shining like a miniature sun. Despite losing its Eva form, he still seemed to be standing upside down on Yomotsu Hirasaka, and his circle of light expanded to engulf the whole mass.

A softer light enveloped the Pacific Ocean as dusk fell. People who were fleeing for their lives suddenly stopped and looked at the oncoming apocalypse from between their fingers.

The detached lunar landmass was slowly breaking into the stratosphere after a long delay. As slow as it was now, its sheer size still caused ripples visible to the naked eye as it entered the atmosphere.

The amount of water displaced in the sky generated myriad basin-like clouds in the troposphere, and the vast potential difference in the air formed thunderclouds, which lit up the sky like nests of lightning. The compressed atmosphere billowed out in a wide shock wave that broke the speed of sound.

Meanwhile, the six-winged figure at its center continued to absorb energy, even as it rapidly began losing its glow.

The shining giant had lost its human form. It barely even looked like an Eva.

It was brought to its knees in the middle of all that light.

Trois had used the full power of her FSB to launch herself upward and watched the whole procession from above.

“Ikari-kun…!”

“He’ll be back…” Asuka sighed. “He hates being around people, but he hates being alone even more. Auf Wiedersehen, Shinji. See you soon. I’ll leave the lights on for you. I’ll get you home this time.”

Asuka finished her goodbye, and the smile disappeared from her face. If it weren’t for the LCL, light would have trickled down her cheeks.

Chapter 48:
Rumble in the Pacific

SHINJI HAD SUCCEEDED in shifting the impact point. The landmass landed 1,200 kilometers southeast from where the Izu Peninsula had once been, the former location of the Ogasawara Islands. Due to the Longinus Ring's shrinking of the Earth, the islands were now located somewhere near the South China Sea.

There was a flash of light over the ocean, as intense as the birth of a new sun. The shock waves it produced burned the molecules in the air, painting the sky bright red. A pandemonium of heat, light, wind, waves, and electricity propagated outward from its center.

Hakone and Tokyo-3 were a thousand kilometers from the epicenter, and they were still hit with three earthquakes that day. Even if the aforementioned phenomenon had not produced any shock waves, Yomotsu Hirasaka hitting the water would definitely have shifted some tectonic plates. The settling of the landmass alone was probably responsible for the third quake.

Back in old Central Dogma, the linear rails set up for the experiment had fallen apart. The Carrier's mace was out of alignment, and its power field had disappeared.

"Maya-san, we have to get out of here!"

"Agreed! All personnel, clear out! What's happening on the outside…?"

The rumbling over the Pacific Ocean didn't stop. In fact, it lasted for several hours.

Night had fallen by the time Toji reached the surface, and the wind blew like a typhoon over the outer rim of the Hakone caldera. The clouds protecting Tokyo-3 had been chased away by the lightning bolts snaking through the sky. The bolts were colorful, possibly due to electric anomalies producing something like an aurora borealis. Sometimes, the clouds themselves even flashed, perhaps as small fragments of the moon fell through them.

“It’s like natural disasters are having a party, and everyone’s invited,” Misato said, although one guest was suspiciously absent.

No matter how slowly it moved, a two-hundred-kilometer landmass like Yomotsu Hirasaka would produce tsunamis upon landing in the Pacific Ocean. There was no avoiding the water that thing would displace. And yet, no tidal waves had been observed thus far.

Six’s Eva flew over the caldera like it had been blown there by the violent air currents. The Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica stopped outside the dome of the sarcophagus, scraping the hard tektite concrete to break its landing. In the end, its damaged hind legs gave out, and it tumbled to a stop.

Meanwhile, Trois’ Eva had gone missing. Contacting her was out of the question, since all the communication lines were in a state of chaos. The newly installed satellites and stratospheric aircraft had either been knocked off course or had their lasers damaged. The guide beacons couldn’t be retrieved to be reset. There was no way of looking for Trois, even if she were still alive.

The next morning, Hakone command received an emergency transmission amid the communications chaos. It turned out that Eva-0.0 had been shooting down larger pieces of debris that were falling to the Earth. But Trois had decided it was time for her to land. She was running low on fuel, and Mari had awakened.

Toji had stayed awake all night in the command center and was thinking a little bit of sun would do his mind some good. He was about to step outside when security stopped him. They told him it was dangerous to leave because parts of the ozone layer had been blown away.

“Those clouds are moving fast,” Toji said. They were as black as they were thick, but from the breaks between them, he could see they were covering a clear blue sky. In fact, the clouds ended abruptly to the southeast.

Toji watched as a vertical line seemed to split the heavens.

“What the hell is that?!”

Above the point of Yomotsu Hirasaka’s impact, which was still covered in thick clouds, he noticed a pillar extending into the sky. He

couldn't see its apex.

Toji stumbled back to the command center. He ordered Trois to do a spectral analysis on the phenomenon before she made her landing.

Asuka's voice shot through his ear. <<We were staring at the thing last night, genius! It goes up and up, and the top just disappears, like an optical illusion! Now let us land, damn it! I'm hungry!>>

<<Waaaah!>>

Asuka's angry complaints were accompanied by the sound of a little girl crying. Mari's wailing echoed throughout the command center, and the people there who knew about her past would never have believed that she was now clinging to Asuka like a frightened child.

Mari had shared her consciousness with the countless animals whose DNA had been spliced into her. Now they were gone, and she was alone. Her researchers would one day learn that this was the first time she'd ever felt loneliness and anxiety. The spatial lens had ripped her "family" out of her DNA, much like how it had ripped the organic data out of Asuka.

<<Waaaaaah!>>

"Someone's cranky… Can you share your findings with us, Trois?"

Rei Trois began reading their observation data. <<Makeup is mostly water… Sodium chloride, magnesium chloride, magnesium sulphate…>>

"It's seawater…" Hyuga muttered from the middle deck.

It's a pillar of seawater stretching into space? That's just great. But what's causing it? Could be that spatial lens again, I suppose. It already did some weird things with the tide.

Toji furled his eyebrows, his expression growing more grim.

"Trois, Asuka. Sorry about this, but you're going to have to head to the spatial lens to see if anything's happened to it. That might be the cause of the pillar."

<<Oh, come on!>>

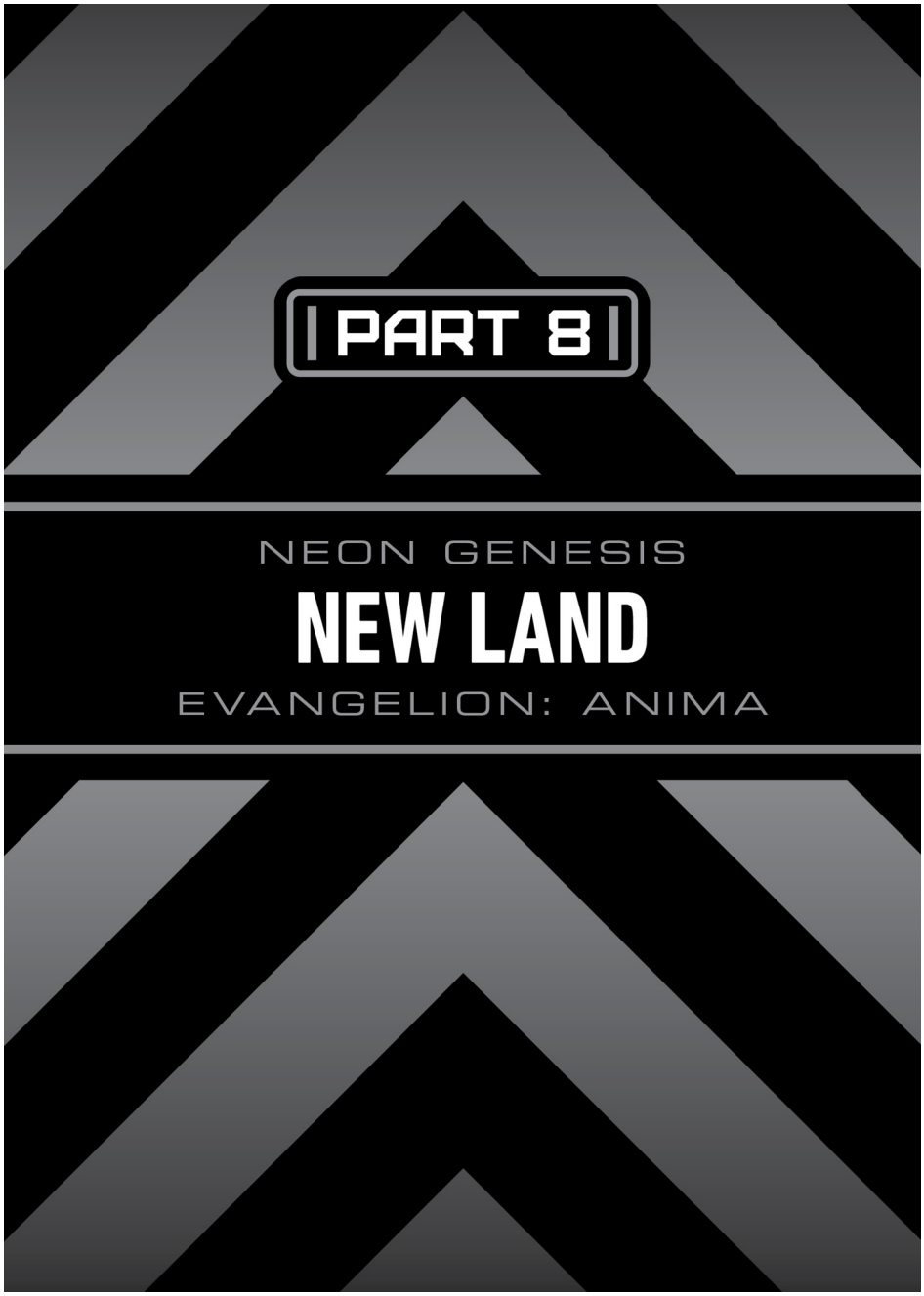
"You might get the same spectrometer readings on the moon side of the lens. Command out."

"Toji-kun…?" Misato put down the receiver in her commander's chair.

“Various countries have sent drones to that area, and they’ve all lost visuals of the object,” Toji said. “I don’t know what Shinji made, but I think we owe it to him to get a good look at it ourselves. That pillar might be the tsunami that should have hit us last night.”

Toji’s speculation was so outrageous that he had to pause and take a breath.

“The moon’s 110,000 kilometers wide now. That’s about the size of the Earth. I’m guessing it’s gonna want to steal our waters, too.”


PART 8
NEON GENESIS
NEW LAND
EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 49:
Noise

THE SOUND OF WAVES could be heard in the science and engineering division of Nerv Japan, crashing loudly then receding softly. The science floor was known as the place where a mob of mad scientists did their work. Maintenance crew rarely ventured there if they didn't have to, and the rest of the personnel went through pains to avoid that floor entirely. The head of the division was notorious for her inflexibility, to the extent of refusing to implement something as innocent as a movie night.

"…"

These were the things that Ibuki Maya, chief of the science and engineering division, had heard spoken about her in the past as she walked this darkened hallway lined with airtight doors.

But now she heard the crashing of waves. She stopped and looked back. Perhaps it was only nerves. She sighed and was about to resume her course when she heard something else.

<<Even for Unit One this is…>>

A human voice!

<<The pilot is synchronizing too much. We can't get a reading!>>

<<We don't know how the battle with the mass-production Evas is developing outside, and some of our own special forces are still inside. There's no reason to activate an unknown Eva in these circumstances.>>

<<We've been transported into Lilith's Egg from God knows where. In any case, we're already drowning in the stream, and a reed is as good as a log if it can get us out.>>

The unseen speakers carried out a strange conversation. She didn't recognize the voices, but she faintly remembered their styles of speech. Maya followed the voices and stopped in front of the room they were coming from.

Wait, this is my room!

< <Second Impact-level energy output frozen like ice within a closed system… Impossible. > >

Maya recognized *that* voice. She banged on the door wheel before throwing it open. The voice had disoriented her to the point where she'd actually forgotten to call for backup.

"Who's there?!"

The noise instantly disappeared. The host A.I. of Maya's room greeted her, turning on the lights as she entered.

No one's here…

But Maya noticed the flickering of her LCD drawing board and dashed toward it.

"What is this…?" A rough schematic had been drawn on it. Blueprints of some kind. The four fairings lined up next to each other hinted that it might be an Evangelion's shoulder pylons. Words and diagrams had been scribbled on it from at least two sides, but there were no new entries on her usage log. There was a circle made up of many overlapping lines, as if drawn by an indecisive artist. On top of the circle were two Λ's, which looked as if they'd been put there by mere force of habit. They looked like cat ears.

Maya drew a deep breath. She would get some sleep and then pursue the hard questions. Yes… Perhaps Toji knew who'd pulled this prank on her. This was her initial reaction.

She stepped back from the drawing board to look again at the diagram on the side when suddenly her files fell all over the floor. She finally addressed *that person* in the room.

"What do you expect me to do, Dr. Akagi?"

It was like observing the Second Impact. All energy would be unleashed during the final phases of the apocalypse and put an end to everything.

Most of the energy would be made up of photons, followed by a tidal wave of particles of every imaginable wavelength. Maya followed the diagram to its conclusion—a straight line to a black gate where everything converged.

"It's as if time has stopped. The final second of the end. No…I doubt we would get even a second in the end."

Chapter 50:
A Dawn Without Shinji

SENTRY DRONES dispatched near Marcus Island in the Pacific Ocean had gone silent. There was no way of knowing what was happening 1,200 kilometers southeast of the former Izu Peninsula where Yomotsu Hirasaka had fallen.

The entire area was full of dark clouds and electromagnetic surges. A pillar of seawater cut through the clouds, disappearing into nothing just before it touched the sky.

Super Eva had turned into a giant of light to capture the two-hundred-kilometer-wide detached lunar landmass. In the end, Shinji had willingly triggered the Third Impact and used its force to dampen Yomotsu Hirasaka's damage.

His cloud of witnesses could only stare as they watched the mythical procession play out before them. None of them wanted to say it was the right thing for him to do, but then again none of them tried to talk him out of it. They went to bed, and upon waking from their dreams, they realized they had placed the fate of the world on the shoulders of a lone seventeen-year-old. It was a hard truth to admit.

"The latest weather chart."

They'd received news about the disasters going on in Hakone and its surroundings, but they still quietly advanced their observation plans. Toji had received data about the seawater pillar from Trois' Eva-0.0, but even he wasn't sure how to talk about it with the rest of the personnel.

The communications booth was still putting out calls to Shinji. Everyone was in silent agreement that it would be a few days before they stopped trying.

"I'm going to school," Ayanami Rei Six said from the open door of the command center. She was wearing a white uniform. The personnel inside were all startled by her sudden statement. They could only stare.

"Have fun!"

Misato was the only one who said anything. All eyes were on the

commander now.

"Look," Misato started, fully aware of the state Rei Six's Eva was in. The Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica had been heavily damaged. Resupply was already underway, but its hind legs still needed to be fixed and its systems tuned. "It's not like she can go on a mission, right?"

"Hang on," a representative from Maya's division said. Even though they could refer to the Eva's black box to learn what had happened in the stratosphere, they had some questions they wanted to ask Six as well. Misato knew that, of course.

"Employees belong in the office and students belong in school. That's a decent way of maintaining normalcy, isn't it? We can't have the black giant take us for a spin every time he shows up."

The black giant is gone, but the moon is still expanding, and disasters are still happening all over the planet. It doesn't look like there's a future for us. Even worse, that crazy myth the black giants were talking about might just come to pass.

So Misato thought.

"Is the high school open today?"

"Let me check…" Aoba tapped some quick queries into his keyboard. "Yep, looks like it."

"Very good."

As the person in charge of Tokyo-3 and the Hakone caldera, Katsuragi Misato wanted to maintain as much normalcy as possible for its citizens. Going to school was a big part of that, and as long as there were no disasters that prevented them from commuting, the schools should remain open.

Aoba tilted his head. "They only have classes up to second period…though they do have extracurricular activities. That all right with you?"

"I think Toji's dying to go, too. But we can't afford to not have you around for the moment. Sorry, Acting Deputy Commander."

"Uhh, sure…"

But it didn't take long before Toji had to go, too. Thirty minutes after Six left, with a slice of toast in her mouth, she sent an emergency signal to the command center. Misato looked up from the map display

on her table while gnawing on her stylus. She glanced at the small window with Six's image and wondered, "Did she forget her notebook?" before returning to the map.

There was something strange about Six's window, however, and she looked at it again.

A strange shadow filled the screen.

<<Shinji's at school!>>

"What?" Misato's brain couldn't process this outrageous statement, because it was too busy processing the other outrageous things on the screen.

Why is everyone wearing black? And those long sleeves… What's with the winter uniforms?

Winter hadn't visited Japan since the Second Impact.

Chapter 51:
Ordinary Classroom

THE CLASSROOM was noisy. Students were overjoyed at seeing their classmates alive. They talked about all the strange things that had happened to them and the strange things that were continuing to happen. Some even used the communication terminals to contact the outside world.

"Well, I tried it!" said one student, corroborating others who'd seen it for themselves. "My clothes go back to normal when I go outside."

"What's going on?"

Rei Six was only about as tall as the waistlines of her classmates. She stepped inside the classroom and walked through their gossip. Shinji was in his seat, taking a textbook out of his backpack. Six kept her distance but moved to get a better look at him. That's when she noticed…

What…?! And I thought Shinji being here was weird…

She called out to the quiet figure standing alone by the lockers. "Hello, Quatre, the me who is angry."

"Hello, Six…the me who knows no fear."

Ayanami Rei Quatre had gone rogue when her mutant Eva was contaminated by the Q.R. Signum. She was supposed to be on the run with Seele/Kaji, and her formerly blue hair was now gray from the scale's influence. She was wearing a black sailor uniform with a long skirt, just like all the other girls in class. She'd chosen this corner of the classroom because she knew no one would bother her here.

Quatre played with the light blue ribbon on her chest. "Do you recognize this uniform?"

Six felt like she did, but somehow she couldn't pull up the corresponding memory. She joined Rei Quatre next to the lockers, thoughts running through her head.

Why is Quatre here? I thought she went rogue. Did she sneak her mutant Eva-0.0 into Tokyo-3 somehow? I should really go see Misato about

this…

"What are you doing here, and what do you want?"

"Have you ever dreamed? I've had them from time to time. Ever since our mental mirroring was broken. Ever since 'we' became 'you'…"

What was Quatre talking about?

"What's that about?" she asked, lifting her chin at the figure across the room.

The two Ayanamis watched as Shinji put his textbooks on his desk.

“Shinji’s at school!”

Quatre ignored the question. “Well, have you? Have you ever dreamed?”

A loud voice interrupted their conversation. “How could you?”

Six turned to look for the source and found two more people who shouldn’t have been there. They were trying to come up with a solution for an impossible problem.

“That’s the only thing I did.” Kensuke folded his hands over his lap. Next to him stood Hikari, looking down on him with hostility.

“I don’t know… I don’t know how I want you to make it up to us…” Hikari closed her eyes and shook her head. She looked troubled.

The intelligence division had a policy of doing anything and everything in the name of achieving its goals. Nerv Japan had severed its ties with the other Nerv organizations, so they’d taken to selling leaks in exchange for information.

Kensuke had traded their Child data to Nerv Germany for information about the relics. As a result, the Horakis had been relocated to Europe without ever suspecting that they were being kidnapped. Furthermore, Hikari’s sister Kodama was turned into a pillar of salt after seeing the light of the Lance of Longinus over the skies of Europe. The intelligence division had stripped Kensuke of his office and put out a warrant for his immediate arrest.

“You should’ve killed me when you had the chance. Now you’re making me feel something like remorse.” Kensuke grabbed his desk and slowly leaned back in his chair, making the front legs hover over the floor tiles.

“This is an awful dream.”

“A dream? I see… I’m dreaming. This is what I’ve always wanted, but now that I’m here, I have nothing to say to you.”

“Hang on, this is *my* dream!” Kensuke shouted, attracting the classroom’s attention. Everyone had been talking in their own little cliques, because they knew how absurd the whole thing was.

This…is what a dream feels like.

The classroom was quiet now, and it felt as if that awful silence should never be broken.

“Teacher’s here!” Ayanami Rei Cinq said as she opened the door.

The Ayanami who'd passed away wore a white coat over her uniform.

Shinji reacted to her voice and said, "Class Rep!"

Hikari complied and quickly returned to her seat. "All stand!"

But Ikari-kun's the class rep now.

Her consciousness began to fade. Rather, she began to awaken from the dream.

You're the class rep now, remember? How long do you plan on staying in junior high? We're high school juniors now.

"Bow!"

That was the last thing Hikari said. By the time her classmates raised their heads, she was gone.

Chapter 52:
Ritterschaft

"MM…"

"Hikari? Are you awake? Can you talk?" Clausewitz asked.

What a weird dream. Everyone was at school, and…

Hikari awoke in a dimly lit room with white walls that looked to be made of glossy resin. Clausewitz's voice came from outside the pilot adjustment tank.

"Yes…"

"The speaker for the European council wishes to talk with you. Politics, mostly nonsense, you know how it is… Sorry to trouble you, but are you well enough to go to the communications room?"

Hands helped her out of the capsule. Her arms were still limp, and she had to hold on to their coats for support. They led Hikari to a chair and sat her down. She was half-conscious, and it was doubtful she noticed when her makeup and hair were being done. Her weary eyes and pale skin were livened up with shadow and rouge.

"There you are, pretty lady."

Ikari-kun, I saw you stop Yomotsu Hirasaka by turning into a giant of light. I know just as well as anyone that that was your final act as an Eva.

It was your final act as a person…

So why were you in my dream?

Hikari remembered the battle of the giants. She remembered overloading her dummy plug with her emotions. But she had no memory of how she'd gotten away from Yomotsu Hirasaka.

Her legs wobbled underneath her in the narrow corridor, and she leaned against the wall for support. *No, the problem isn't my legs.*

She opened the hatch and was greeted by a light drizzle against her face. Salty. Like the tide had been mixed into the rain.

Applause followed and then the bright flash of cameras. She flinched from the sudden exposure as she realized she was on board a

U.S. aircraft carrier. The Euro Eva, Heurtebise, was kneeling on the deck. Its face was scarred, and there were burns all over its restraint armor. Wires kept the giant in place to compensate for the reduction in gravity. She felt like a Lilliputian standing at the feet of Gulliver.

"Huh…? What's going on?"

Heurtebise had vanquished humanity's greatest enemy, the black giant, Armaros. The media had gotten ahold of footage from the Euro Eva's visual sensors. The world had seen the moment when the Devil's Backbone fired a black hole that annihilated the monster's torso. They'd been dying for some good news.

In fact, it was Shinji's Super Eva, the giant of light, that had done most of the heavy lifting in the fight against Armaros, though Hikari had dealt the killing blow.

Heurtebise the Armaros Slayer.

That title dominated the headlines of all remaining media outlets in Europe. The Europeans had finally got revenge on the monster who'd turned 180,000 of their own into pillars of salt. Now, they hailed the warrior who'd vanquished him.

For one night, Hikari was the hero who'd destroyed the world's greatest enemy.

Chapter 53:
Sleeping Shinji

THE STUDENTS BOWED as the teacher entered the classroom. When they raised their heads, they saw that "Self-Study" had been written in bold on the blackboard, along with some assignments so they wouldn't get too rowdy. A video recording of the lesson was playing.

But none of the students could remember whether they were in homeroom or some other class.

No one's surprised that Hikari's gone.

Little Rei Six continued observing the classroom from her seat—front row next to the windows. What surprised her most was how little she was actually surprised.

My thoughts aren't slowing down or anything… It's like there's some strange power at work…

Still, she continued inspecting the hallway, the classroom, and everyone inside it.

Why is Cinq here? That's not even funny.

Ayanami Rei Cinq was one of the four remaining Ayanami clones. She was the most physically developed among them. Ayanami Rei Trois was the oldest, having survived even the Battle at Nerv HQ three years ago. But Cinq had had a longer incubation time. After they pulled her out of the artificial womb, her growth had quickly surpassed Trois'. She was killed on the first lunar reconnaissance mission.

So what was she doing here now?

Six pondered as the class quieted down. Soon, the recording was the only source of sound.

In the back of the class, Quatre propped her elbows on the desk and whispered to Kensuke in front of her. "This absurdity seems nostalgic to you, Aida Kensuke. I think you're quite right in calling it a dream."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." Kensuke sighed as he

continued to observe his surroundings. He knew he couldn't let his guard down. "I wouldn't pick something this stupid for some kind of deception. This place is probably here to throw me off. So let's assume it's a dream… I couldn't care less about the physical implications. But whose dream is it?"

"You've got a hunch, don't you?"

"Yeah. It's the one who seems most at home here…"

Rei Quatre and Kensuke fixed their eyes on Shinji.

"This being a dream would explain why Rei Cinq's here when she's supposed to be dead. But…" He felt a strange presence as he watched Cinq's back. "I don't know…"

"What is it?"

"Could be nothing. Anyway, can I borrow you for a sec?"

The two of them got out of their chairs without a sound and opened the door in the back of the class. The hallways were strangely silent.

"Ten bets we're the only class in attendance…"

Kensuke went down the stairs, holding his hands out the whole time like he was feeling for something. Quatre followed suit. They finally reached the entrance where the shoe lockers were.

Kensuke's hand disappeared after it passed a certain point in space. "Looks like this is the border between dream and reality."

"So, you're not here."

"And neither are you, fugitive Ayanami Quatre."

He pulled back his arm, and it returned to normal.

"My right hand's made of flesh instead of a prosthetic. That's how I knew this was a hallucination from the start."

Kensuke and Quatre made their way back to class.

"Say, you're with Kaji-san, aren't you? I mean he's Seele now, but you know what I'm saying."

"And what if I am?"

"Tell Kaji-san to team up with Nerv Japan."

Quatre scoffed. "As if he would listen… What's the point?"

“There will be a point if we can clarify what Kaji’s doing,” Kensuke said.

“Meaning?” Quatre’s curiosity was piqued.

“Seele is obsessed with the replica Longinus. I think he said they were the ones who made it. Either way, they’re worried about whether they can secure the lance for future Instrumentality Projects. I’m telling you, Kaji-san can make a deal with Nerv Japan that will satisfy everyone involved.”

Quatre was entranced, until Kensuke added…

“As for you, you can go back to Nerv. Aren’t you running out of reasons to stay in your rebellious phase?”

He’d lost her. She turned around, but her vision was growing blurry.

“Why would you…?!”

Kensuke shrugged.

Anyone can tell by the way you smile at Ikari and the rest.

“Yo, Kensuke!” A loud voice cut their conversation short.

Toji, Six’s backup, was yelling from outside the entrance.

“Oh, hey… It’s Toady Toji!” Kensuke grinned and stepped outside the dream.

“What’d you call me?!”

Toji rushed at him in his superior officer’s suit, extending his arm to form a lariat. His arm whooshed right past Kensuke like he was a ghost, and he lost his balance, plunging into a trash can next to the shoe lockers. When he got up, he discovered that he was now wearing his black school uniform.

“Acting Deputy Commander Suzuhara!”

The scientist with the observation instruments caught up with him, but an invisible barrier denied him entry into the school. Evidently, there were conditions for entering the dream classroom. Toji stepped out, took the equipment, and walked back in. Quatre watched this with some amusement.

“Wait, Quatre?! Are you the one who warped Kensuke here?!”

Toji took up a fighting stance, and that was when he noticed the

terminal on his arm. The Hakone caldera had been equipped with eight quantum flow inclinometers, which had proved their worth on the Apple's Core, just in case any hostiles decided to teleport in unannounced. But now, those terminals weren't giving out any warning signals.

What is going on?

Kensuke had demonstrated to Quatre that all she had to do to leave was step outside. She answered Toji calmly.

"I've been dragged into this space, too. It would be quite pointless to put handcuffs on me. Aida and Horaki-san were here as well. You could say we're the 'dream transfer students.'"

"What's Hikari doing here?"

"Good question… Perhaps the dreamer thought she fit the scenery of his everyday life…" Rei Quatre smiled—rebelliously but not without relief.

"Stop talking in circles and give it to me straight."

"Self-study? Where'd the teacher go?" Toji said upon entering the room.

Some students noticed him. "Yo, Suzuhara! Did you see our clothes?"

The recording had stopped playing, and the classroom was noisy again.

"Our clothes? Well, they look like something my folks would wear back in the day, but that's about it."

He scanned the room and thought, *Wow, everyone's here.*
He waved to Shinji, who was sitting a few rows from the windows. He fiddled with his right hand, reveling in how good it felt, when someone started pinching his ear.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Rei Six was not pleased. "You are late! You missed Hikari."

Kensuke disappeared, but I guess she just woke up…

The slender barrel of a camera lens had been crammed into the chest pocket of his stuffy black uniform.

Quatre returned to the classroom with a bag full of complex broadband observation equipment she'd received from the science division. She set it on top of the lockers.

Toji had arrived with science division personnel, but he was the only one who could carry things through what Kensuke called the border between dream and reality. In fact, Toji's beat-up school bag was apparently the only object allowed to enter the dream, so they'd enlisted Quatre to stow most of their equipment inside.

In his ear was a tiny transceiver, which he'd used to receive Six's phone call and would hopefully allow him to maintain contact with the command center, too. Toji felt that he was at the center of the phenomenon. He walked toward Shinji, who sat in the middle of the classroom.

<<You're late, Suzuhara-kun. Get to your seat.>>

"Oh, yeah, sorry…"

He felt strangely oppressed by the scolding and quietly shuffled to his desk. He'd already been informed of Cinq's existence, but he had no idea why she would say that.

Back in the command center, the footage that was being broadcast wasn't footage at all. Rather, it was still images that changed every two seconds.

Several students had already reported that they were being taught different subjects. It was thought to be some kind of hallucination or psychological interference that pandered to the individual's memory. The stills were likely a product of all the filtering.

"What's going on? We're getting audio through the speakers, aren't we?"

Misato stopped drafting their next plan and shrugged. To her eyes, the subject was Divisions of Ancient History.

"The A.I. can't make out any English written on the blackboard. The image and voice recognition engines are repeatedly saying they have no information to process. The voice coming through the broadcast is mostly noise, although it looks a lot like a sine wave, if that helps."

For Hyuga, it was Foreign Language.

"What do you think?" Misato turned to Fuyutsuki. He looked

shocked. “Sensei…?”

Fuyutsuki saw Rei Cinq in the teacher’s position.

The old man remained quiet, and Misato couldn’t make out what had gotten him so spooked. She turned to the display and picked up her headset to give some orders.

<<Toji-kun, you might not want to stay there for too long. We think it could be messing with your emotions!>>

Toji snapped out of it upon hearing her warning. He reached for the eraser on his desk and threw it really hard at Shinji. “Ow!”

Who? Shinji turned and saw Toji give him a thumbs-up.

“What are you doing,” Shinji mouthed. Ever thin-skinned, that was the Shinji Toji knew. He smiled but then remembered what he’d come here to do.

He wrinkled his forehead and leaned forward. He banged his elbow on the desk, making a loud noise that drew the attention of all his classmates.

“Shinji can’t be here. He made sure that he couldn’t be here, so who the hell are you?”

It was a cold fact that Shinji’s Super Eva had turned into a giant of light and brought an extraterrestrial island down on the Pacific Ocean. No one knew where he was now, not even Toji. But the way this Shinji was acting, it was as if the tragedy had never occurred.

Toji regretted letting Shinji carry the burdens of heaven and earth on his shoulders all by himself. He couldn’t accept this false peace.

“Suzuhara-kun, you can talk after class.”

Cinq said this like she was the class representative. But Toji continued.

“Shinji protected everyone! This guy beat Armaros and took the weight of Yomotsu Hirasaka by himself!”

“Suzuhara-kun!”

“Arma…? Yomotsu…” Shinji muttered to himself.

“Yeah! Remember…”

“That’s enough,” Cinq said.

She sighed, and Toji’s view grew dim.

“Don’t wake him, Suzuhara-kun.”

Cinq reprimanded Toji with a glare. He was standing in the hallway with her.

What happened? He shook his head to try and make sense of things.

Cinq had finally noticed that something was going on by the way Toji had tried to get Shinji’s attention.

“That boy wanted to stop it.”

Does she know what’s going on?

“The Impact was frozen in time in its last 0.82 seconds. That’s why it didn’t do as much damage as you expected. Put another way, Shinji has 0.82 seconds left to live. So you can’t wake him up. Not yet. But I promise we’ll do something about it.”

Toji didn’t know where all of this was coming from, so he could only stare at Rei Cinq as she wrinkled her forehead.

“Oh… Do you think me wearing a high school uniform is too much? I’m sorry, but I felt nostalgic for it, that’s all.”

Fuyutsuki gasped as he saw the image from Toji’s pocket camera. He finally recognized the outline of her figure. He uttered the name that he’d buried deep in his memories.

“Yui…? Isn’t that Shinji’s…”

The woman bearing Cinq’s likeness opened the door. She turned to Toji and smiled.

“Take care of Shinji for me, Suzuhara-kun.”

She closed the door behind her.

Toji’s vision blurred again, and when he came to, he was sitting on the grounds outside the school. He’d managed to get himself kicked out of an imaginary classroom.

Shinji didn’t remember what his mother looked like. Among the Ayanami’s, Cinq bore the most resemblance to Yui. Perhaps that was why she’d assumed that form, to protect the peaceful dream of her son.

“I’m not sure how I feel leaving mommy dearest to handle everything…”

Toji got up and brushed off his pants. In the end, he hadn't been able to figure out anything about the dream classroom. His classmates were under a strange mass hypnosis. That was about the extent of his findings.

The roar of jet engines droned over Tokyo-3. They'd taken off from Mount Daikan airport, located on the southern face of the Hakone caldera, and were circling the city overhead, probably as a sensor test. After a lap, the jets zoomed away to the Yomotsu Hirasaka crash site.

Toji called the scientists over to him. "Come on, let's get outta here."

Meanwhile, Rei Trois' Eva-0.0 had appeared in the western skies. By sheer luck, Trois had managed to secure the rehumanized Asuka, along with Mari, pilot of the U.S. Eva.

From afar, her unit seemed to be descending slowly, but even with all her deceleration, she was still falling fast. Her gamma-ray laser cannon and propulsion units opened like a parachute, and she took on the appearance of a bouquet floating toward Lake Ashi.

"Pretty good with the current wind speeds."

Toji perked his ears and heard a delayed bang in the distance. Eva-0.0 had activated its A.T. Field and landed in a body of water outside the caldera. He wondered whether the classroom would still be here tomorrow. He wondered how Rei Trois and Asuka would react to it.

"How'd she set up an A.T. Field with three people in an Eva?"

Chapter 54:
Yomotsu Hirasaka Island

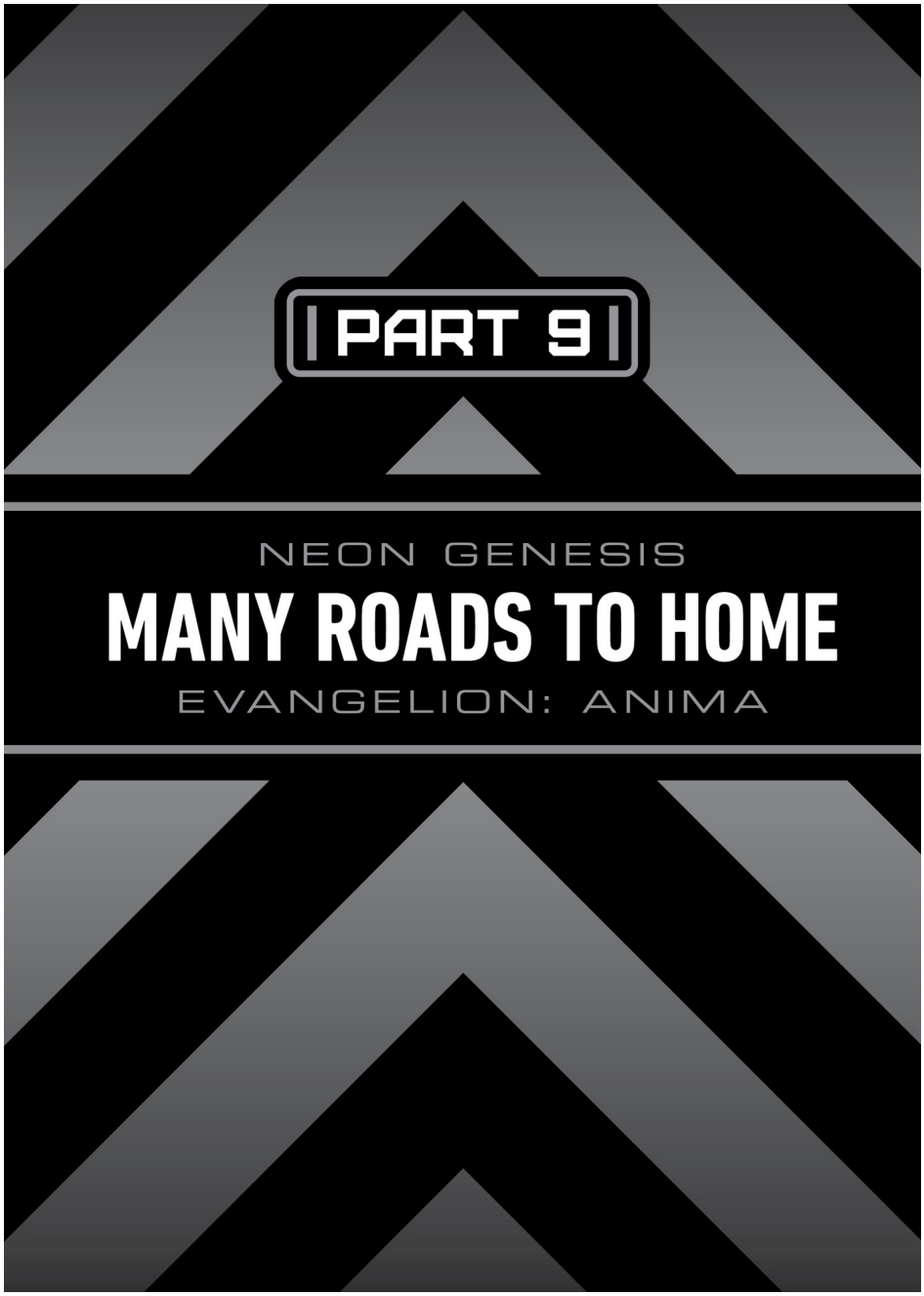
THICK CLOUDS HAD GATHERED over the newly formed island, although its peak was still visible, if only because the clouds didn't reach that high. The summit, which was so tall that its collapse seemed inevitable, was nineteen thousand meters above sea level and just breached the bottom of the stratosphere. You could stack two Mount Everests on top of each other, and you still wouldn't get to the top.

The stratospheric network of airships, which was now the world's only method of communication, would be forced to rethink their routes. The larger American and European observation crafts had circled the thick clouds several times, confirming that Yomotsu Hirasaka was now a new island in the Pacific Ocean.

The island had the topography of a plateau and the perimeter of a pentagon.

The energy from the fall had caused the ocean floor around it to rise up as a ring of smaller islands. Most of the sentry drones had dropped out of range, but one of the operators reported seeing a thick forest behind all that fog. The lunar origins of Yomotsu Hirasaka should've made it impossible for it to support any kind of plant life, yet there were chlorophyll reactions in the log before the drone dropped out of reach. People were skeptical but not altogether unbelieving.

The last thing the drone saw was a large-scale landslide, which unveiled a mountain range shaped like the back of a large beast.


PART 9
NEON GENESIS
MANY ROADS TO HOME
EVANGELION: ANIMA

Chapter 55:
White Coat Party

"NO, I'M NOT GOING," Asuka said.

Toji thought she would've been interested, at least. He took out a tablet and showed her pictures of the high school he and Six had been in that afternoon, though he wasn't entirely convinced that he hadn't dreamed the entire episode.

"Ya sure about that? Shinji's in there."

The last time Asuka had seen Shinji, he was a giant of light carrying the entire weight of Yomotsu Hirasaka on his back. Now he was sitting in class as if nothing had happened.

"Now you're interested."

"Is he so lonely that he has to haunt our school now? Besides, you haven't told me why Hikari was in the Euro Eva—"

Asuka stopped when she saw Hikari in Rei Six's picture. She wasn't supposed to be anywhere near Tokyo-3. She also noticed Kaji's former assistant at Nerv's intelligence division. Kensuke was there, and none of them were happy to see him.

Asuka didn't know what had transpired on Earth after her recon mission to the moon, but she retained none of the

memories of her time as an Eva synthesis, either. All of this came as a surprise to her, but Toji had to move her along.

"Never mind that. Look at the classroom."

Misato, Fuyutsuki, and the other commanding officers at Nerv Japan didn't show much interest in the classroom. Apparently, this strange anomaly was using images from Shinji's residual consciousness to produce images that other observers would be comfortable with.

But they were adults and as such were prone to giving up on lost causes.

Shinji was dead to them.

He'd escaped death so many times in the past. Even Toji had been ready to accept his fate when Super Eva had turned into a pillar of salt.

But again, Shinji had managed to return. Toji thought he had enough faith for one more run. He'd come to Asuka because he needed an accomplice.

"What are they wearing?" Asuka asked about the uniforms.

"Doesn't really matter. That's what we'll be wearing when we step into the classroom."

<<The classroom is Shinji's dream,>> Shinji's mother had said, under Cinq's likeness.

The intelligence division had discovered that the black uniform everyone wore in the classroom had originally belonged to Yui. Shinji might be the dreamer, but his mother had influenced the setting.

"This uniform's so frumpy it looks like it belongs in the last century. I wouldn't be caught dead in it. I'm not going."

"Can you please not think about fashion for a second?"

Toji jabbed at Asuka, while Little Rei Six laughed at her, lips red with tomato sauce. "Frump, frump!"

Not a trace of foreign organic data was left in Asuka's body. The newly reconstituted seventeen-year-old had regained her individuality, but her physical form was far from stable. Sometimes, the outline of her figure blurred into particles and only regained their solidity when she gasped herself back into existence.

Asuka received a welcome worthy of anyone who'd been assumed dead. Everyone was shocked to see her in one piece. Misato had hugged her for longer than she ever had.

Now she was in the Ayanami tuning room along with Trois, Six, and U.S. Eva pilot, Mari.

Her organic data had been in a state of turbulence for a long time, and she'd been exposed to a space battle right after that. Her vitals were now being monitored in the white room filled with machines.

They had to wait a long time for the procedure to finish. The main reason was that the one conducting the tests, Ibuki Maya, chief of the science and engineering divisions, had been preoccupied with something in the cage. Even Toji didn't know what she was up to.

And so the girls enjoyed a slumber party in the sterile

environment. Toji felt incredibly awkward walking in on them when all he wanted was to check up on Asuka.

Asuka, Rei Trois, Rei Six, and even Mari were all in white coats. They sat on the floor in a circle, feet bare and hair down.

Misato had warmed up several frozen pizzas as a treat for what Rei Six was calling Asuka's homecoming party.

The biggest surprise was Mari, pilot of the U.S. Eva. She was as small as Six and stayed very close to Asuka, mumbling under her breath.

She'd completely changed. The cat ears on her head were no more. Like Asuka, she'd been broken down and reconstituted by the spatial lens. When she materialized at the convergence point, what appeared wasn't a test subject with a horde of animals spliced into her DNA, but a healthy little girl.

Anyone would've clapped their hands at such a happy ending, but not everyone could enjoy happiness when it was given to them. Mari felt lost without her pack, and she clung to Asuka like a gosling to a mother goose.

Trois picked the salami off her pizza—she'd never liked it—and gave it to Mari. The little girl eyed the meat cautiously before wolfing it down.

"Woof!" she announced.

"Woof!" Trois repeated back to her and wondered if the girl was finally enjoying herself.

"I have no idea what's going on here." Toji cleared his throat.

I can't be too pushy, or I'll lose them.

"You know, the Shinji in that classroom looked like he didn't remember any of you."

That might be too obvious…

"He what?"

Nope, that was perfect! Toji kept his face like a stone to prevent himself from grinning and slapping his knee.

Easy now…

The red fish had taken the bait. While Asuka no longer wanted

any special treatment, she doggedly maintained that everyone should be treated according to their merits.

Rei Trois noticed that Toji's statement was a bluff to enlist Asuka's aid.

Six, the only one who'd been present in the classroom the entire time, said, "Really? I don't think he—"

Before she could reveal the truth, Trois shoved a plastic fork loaded with pickled jalapeno into her open mouth.

"Gaah!"

Six's hair stood on end as if something had just exploded in her face. She was sensitive to spicy foods. The pulse on her monitors spiked, stirring Azuchi, who was sleeping beside her.

Trois knew she couldn't help Shinji on her own. She also knew that Asuka wouldn't sit idly by and do nothing. She debated whether burning her little sister's taste buds had been the right thing to do.

Not a mistake.

But she couldn't help feel a certain degree of frustration at letting Asuka do all the work for her.

Chapter 56:
Midnight Raid

"SWITCH OFF THE LIGHTS at hole fifteen, please. It's too bright."

"This is Mount Daikan command. Copy that."

Lieutenant Colonel Kasuga's voice came over the speakers. <<Mount Daikan command to Akashima. Endo, move into battle position.>>

"Akashima. Copy that. Standing by."

South of Lake Ashi, to the west of Mount Daikan, lay a golf course that had been repurposed by the JSSDF. Here, the mechanized giant Akashima was stripped of its equipment. Its N_2 turbines roared as power surged into its heavy limbs.

A loud whistle indicated that all personnel should watch their step as the robot was undressed. Various travel locks were released and waterproof coverings removed. The containers on its arms were unloaded and set upon three layered palettes usually reserved for heavy machinery.

"Checking gyro calibration."

"GC check green."

"I really wanted to catch up with *I-409*… The guys at Nerv Japan are going to laugh at our poor planning, Lieutenant Colonel," Endo complained. The pilot of the Akashima watched as mechanics armed his mecha.

<<Let's hope it's a false alarm, warrant officer. We have a job to do before we can plant our flag at Yomotsu Hirasaka.>>

"Copy that," Endo said, looking at the container that stored an oversized Hinomaru. The JSSDF had devoted all their efforts to search and rescue. Meanwhile, the Air Force and Marines were currently staking out Yomotsu Hirasaka Island.

Military forces from other nations also had their eyes on the newly formed island, though they deployed their armies under the pretense of the UN's emergency forces. They filled the waters near the

Ogasawara Islands, and Japan had to show their sovereignty over the territory.

That was where Akashima Corps, JSSDF's anti-Angel unit, was supposed to come in. They were currently stationed on the southern side of the Hakone caldera, which was now a piece of land between the Izu Peninsula and Honshu. They were supposed to send Akashima plant their flag on the new island.

Akashima, the JSSDF's mechanized giant, could fly over the ocean using the ground effect. But the seas were running wild due to the reduced gravity from having the moon so close, so long-distance travel over water was out of the question.

The giant catamaran submarine, *I-409*, which usually supported Akashima and carried the giant on its back, had been sent ahead. It was the modern iteration of *I-404* and *I-405*, equipped with greatly increased reserve buoyancy and joined by a bridge wing.

They'd received reports from *I-409* about an unknown mass several hundred meters long, which couldn't be detected by their radar. Whatever it was, it was huge, and it was speeding toward the Izu Peninsula.

Japan had yet to enter a state of emergency, because the object only spread out in two dimensions. It could just be stray bits of material or oil leaks from the seabed after the fall of Yomotsu Hirasaka. Politicians and scientists agreed for once, and they refused to send people into a panic over some underwater debris.

But Kasuga had decided to send Akashima out anyway.

<<Can't we just let Nerv handle this?>>

Endo was still sulky. He'd been woken up far too early in the morning for this operation.

"Nerv Japan has lost Super Eva, and the Evas they do have are all heavily damaged. They won't be leaving Mount Daikan Airport any time soon."

Lieutenant Colonel Kasuga looked over the control panels at the Mount Daikan command center. One of them blinked and changed to a different color. A recon chopper was phoning in.

"This is Spotter 3. Object has been sighted. It's moving toward Izu Peninsula."

The JSSDF recon chopper couldn't explain what it was seeing. The strange mass had been indistinguishable from the surface of the sea, but all of a sudden, its center began to squirm and rise.

"Spotter 3 to Mount Daikan command. Object is no longer two-dimensional. It looks like a snake…or some kind of fish."

The clouds were dark and heavy, and visibility was low. Even so, they could see that the specimen ramming itself against the cliffside was about seventy to eighty meters long. Its efforts were eventually rewarded, as it made it over the rock face.

"Hey…that thing has legs!"

The chopper pilot and the Mount Daikan command personnel had all seen this creature as children. They recalled the pages of their animal encyclopedias, particularly the section on gilled creatures turning into lunged creatures.

"Aquatic life's first landfall…"

The beast walked on, consuming trees as it moved.

"We have visual confirmation that two more of those things have landed on Mishima Coast, southwest of Mount Daikan!"

Siblings of the monster attacking Izu Peninsula were making their way to the Hakone caldera.

The Akashima launched without waiting for further orders. Its turbines revved up, and it started dashing, shifting into ground effect mode. The giant was still too low to the ground, however, and it scraped against the rocks. It activated its auxiliary rockets, and by the time the shift was complete, it was flying low and sliding down the slope.

<<Endo!>>

"Civilians are moving back to Susono and Iwanami!"

There was a large residential area near Susono and Iwanami, which had now become a coastline. Tokyo-3 had taken in refugees whose homes might be affected by the erratic weather activity. They stayed inside the caldera on UN-leased land, but some of them had started going back home.

Nerv's greatest fears came to pass as the command center was

flooded with emergency calls from local police.

"Seventy percent of the city is now combat ready!"

Nerv Japan had issued the emergency order throughout the Hakone caldera after seeing footage from their drones and receiving a call from the JSSDF.

"Why didn't the quantum flow inclinometers react?!" Fuyutsuki asked Maya over the monitor. He was in the command center, while she was still in the cage, looking tired but not exhausted.

<<Because they aren't universal sensors. They only account for quantum dislocations, which means that ordinary movements don't cause enough quantum noise for them to respond. Did you not read the report?>>

Someone was in a rebellious mood.

"Maya, get up here, please," Misato cut in.

<<I have things to attend to here. Besides, I can monitor the situation just fine—>>

"We've got calls coming in from local municipalities!" Aoba said.

"Tell them the subject may be an Angel-class threat!" Fuyutsuki yelled at Aoba instead of Maya.

Back on the top deck, the elevator doors behind Misato opened.

"You guys can't be here!"

"And who are you to decide?!"

Toji was at the head of the mob, though he was being pushed by Asuka, who was still in her surgical gown. In fact, Mari, Rei Trois, and Rei Six were all in surgical gowns. Six was even followed by her screening robot and Azuchi, the golden retriever.

"Girls, you're still under observation!"

"What is this…?"

The main screen displayed the newly set up port town to the west of the mountain, near Mikuni Pass. The exposure had been cranked up so they could see better in the dark of night. A black, lizard-like creature was slithering about the buildings.

"What's an enemy doing here?" Asuka muttered, growing angrier

with every word. “Shinji and Hikari killed Armaros…so what is that thing doing here?! I thought this was supposed to be our happy ending?! What am I supposed to do with Unit Two?!”

The city had been converted into a battlefield, but all was silent. Their guided missiles could reach outside the caldera, but people were living there.

Trois made a suggestion. “Commander Katsuragi, equip Unit Zero with terrestrial armaments. I’ll go, even if I only have one arm to work with.”

“Both units are still being repaired,” Toji said. “Eva-0.0 has had its core removed because it lost an arm.”

“Six?” Misato called out to her, still not looking back.

“Yeah?”

“Good, you’re not sleepy yet.”

“My mouth stings.”

“I know its hind legs are still damaged, but I’ll go in the Allegorica if I have to. I’ll stand by in the cage.” Trois was adamant.

“I know you’re compatible, but Six is the only one who knows how to operate the Allegorica system.”

The monster on the screen charged the convoy of refugees and began eating them. It wasn’t clear if it had planned to do this or if it had just tripped. The beast seemed confused.

“Is it a bio weapon made specifically to target humans?!” Aoba asked.

Mari, gripping Asuka’s hand, whispered, “It’s just hungry…”

Chapter 57:
Instinct

THE MONSTER WAS HUNTING DOWN citizens who'd returned to their homes.

The one that had landed on Izu Peninsula seemed to be an herbivore. But this one had landed in an urban area with little vegetation, so perhaps it had started eating humans purely out of convenience. Either way, it didn't give a second glance at the trees once it got a taste for humans.

People panicked as the monster undulated toward them. It raged through the streets, bulldozing cars and devouring anyone in its path. The black creature loomed over the terrified citizens.

"Brace for impact!" The Akashima jumped in from the side, knocking the creature away.

The black beast's skin glowed upon contact, absorbing the Akashima's kinetic energy.

"Did you see that?!" Endo asked his gunner.

"That was an A.T. Field. No doubt about it."

"Permission to speak freely, sir!" the operator said.

"Granted!"

"I didn't feel anything like bone upon impact."

"Interesting. But why has it taken the form of an invertebrate?"

"Subject losing speed. It's reeling!"

"All right. Shift into battle mode!"

The round nose of the plane became the Akashima's chest upon transforming. Just as it finished, it deliberately delayed its thrusters and wings folding in to twist its body and kick the monster away.

The momentum carried the beast through a forest, leveling the trees. It slowly rose, noting the Akashima as an enemy, and attacked.

"Weapons live. All twenty of them."

"Yes, sir! Do you think it's an Angel…?"

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s just a meatbag with blood and guts that happens to be able to generate an A.T. Field. Even people have been known to have Pattern Blue, if only momentarily. Anyway. Take aim. Fire!”

BOOM!

Twenty large-caliber guns, arranged in five columns and four rows, fired continuously, creating a wall of shells. The monster hid behind its A.T. Field, but the bullets tore through it.

“Direct hit!”

“Mount Daikan command, target down. Hang on, scratch that.”

<<This is Mount Daikan command to Akashima. Nerv’s new four-legged unit is heading your way from the direction of Lake Ashi.>>

The Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica’s icon beeped on their radar.

“I guess they’re going to deal with the target at Iwanami… I thought it was still damaged.”

The Eva-00 Type-F Allegorica flew in with a cascade of N_2 reactor-powered gravitons, like a heavy VTOL. It landed on the side of a mountain and took a sniping position. It armed the Field Piercer Angel’s Backbone and took aim at the target.

Endo was contemplating whether he should provide support when an urgent transmission came in.

<<This is Spotter 1. Two new bogeys have made landfall at Yugawara.>>

“Weapons live.”

《This is Spotter 1. Two new bogeys have made land-fall at Yugawara.》

The clouds in the east lit up with the fire of guided weaponry.

"Come on!" Endo said.

There was a flash of light behind them, followed by a delayed explosion. Rei Six's Allegorica had blown the creature to bits. The Akashima turned to look and saw something unexpected.

"What the hell…?"

The ground was soaked.

"It doesn't have guts or skin… Is it just…seawater?"

The Akashima shifted into high-speed mode to quickly dispose of the new monsters. Endo felt he was in for a battle of attrition, judging by the sheer number that had spawned so far.

Meanwhile in the Nerv Japan command center…

"Individually, they're not much of a threat, but there doesn't seem to be an end to them," Fuyutsuki said.

"We don't have enough units to handle them all at once. I'll contact the JSSDF so we can split the battlefield."

"Please do," Misato said.

"We're receiving reports of creatures like it landing on the coast of Honshu… Uh, Commander Katsuragi?" Aoba said. "This is the seventh dispatch call."

"Tell them our island is under attack. We can't provide support." Misato repeated her decision for the seventh time.

"What are things like outside the island? I thought the JSSDF had it under control."

"The JSSDF have successfully intercepted some but not others. Either way, we're running up a lot of casualties," Aoba said.

Hyuga followed with a more scientific assessment. "So far they've landed in the Ogasawara Islands, Izu Islands, Izu Peninsula, and northern and southern Honshu, in that order."

"And what do you make of that?"

"It looks like they're moving out of Yomotsu Hirasaka in a cone shape," Hyuga said.

“It’s a cone now, but it might be forming a circle…”

“Bogey sighted in Tokyo-3! North Sengokuhara area!” an operator shouted.

That was an urban combat zone, as far from the coast as could be.

“How is it in a city center?! Pull up the map!”

An icon lit up to indicate the new hostile. “There! Along the Hayakawa River!”

“I should’ve known!” Misato banged on the console. “It’s going up the river!”

“It’s right next to a civilian shelter!”

A cluster of defensive machine guns opened fire on the monster. Bullets sparked and smoked, but in the end they bounced harmlessly off the lizard-like creature’s field. It crawled under a building, where the guns couldn’t reach it.

“Where’s Six?!”

“On the other side of the caldera. Distance is…”

<<I’m on my way—Kyaa!>> Six responded, but one of the creatures latched on to the already-damaged hind legs of her Allegorica as she was taking off. She fell to the ground.

“Six!”

The black monster ran amok in the shelter area, sniffing the air for prey. It crawled along the buildings, breaking through them wildly, until it reached the civilian shelter.

After six charges, the top of the shelter was destroyed. The shielding was supposed to be bombproof, but it was of little use against a force that could gouge it out.

“Arm the guided missiles!”

“Wait!” Fuyutsuki said, cutting Misato off. “The only effective weapons we have are anti-Angel penetrators. One miscalculation and the shelter is done for!”

“Quantum flow inclinometers picking up a disturbance! Mount Kamiyama plateau!” Hyuga shouted, though no one immediately took notice.

Everyone had descended into a panic. In fact, they were so afraid,

none of them had noticed their own hysteria. Mount Kamiyama had formerly been the highest peak in the Hakone caldera, until it was flattened during the battle with Sahaquiel. Now a circle of light was gathering on its horizontal summit.

<<Good to see you're all keeping busy.>>

The decoded voice echoed in the command center through the old tactical network.

Misato cringed. It was Kaji.

Thirty blades of light rushed like a blizzard from Mount Kamiyama toward the urban area, piercing the black monster. The creature burst like a water balloon pricked with a needle.

"That's…"

Six watched the light from the south side of the caldera. She recognized it from somewhere.

"That's Marmaros' weapon! Quatre's mutant Eva has it?!"

<<I came to talk, but it seems that will have to wait,>> Kaji said ominously.

The color of mutant Eva-0.0's hostile icon changed on the display.

"Signs of another warp gate opening up on Kamiyama Plateau!"

"Wait!" Misato grabbed a headset and started yelling into the microphone. "Ryoji! Seele! You should know what that thing is! Armaros is dead, so why are we still being invaded?!"

Silence.

Then an answer.

<<Do you still think this is an invasion? Those things are merely vestiges of creatures who failed to obtain life. They'll die soon enough. They eat only to satisfy their appetites and can neither grow nor breed.>>

"Why are there so many of them?!"

<<Because they are trying to open the gates of heaven.>>

That was the last thing Seele/Kaji said before the icon for Quatre's mutant Eva disappeared from the Kamiyama plateau.

"Wait! I'm not finished with you!"

“Misato-san… Commander… They’re gone!”

“Toji-kun…”

“But our enemies are still here…”

Nerv headquarters watched as a series of flashes blazed from the west to the east over Kamiyama Plateau. The three monsters on the coast of Yugawara were annihilated by the JSSDF’s vaporizer bombs. That was the worst of the invasion.

The number of monsters that made landfall decreased drastically after that. Dawn broke, and the invading force was no more.

Seele/Kaji had been telling the truth. The few monsters that landed on the Izu Peninsula had all stopped their invasion a few kilometers from the coast and liquified into seawater.

Chapter 58:
Many Roads to Home

TOJI COULDN'T STOP YAWNING that morning. He was exhausted. He was going to school after a very eventful night that had left a lot of unfinished business. He wanted to see Shinji and Cinq, not so much to shirk said business, but to finish it.

He scratched his head.

What should I talk about? What am I allowed *to talk about?*

The entrance to Shinji's dream was in a slightly different place that morning. Toji had barely reached the shoe lockers when his clothes changed into the black uniform.

The attending students had gotten used to the strange phenomenon, yet they were still entertained by the compulsory change of dress.

"Beats having to change every time."

The uniform belonged to a time when Shinji's mother, Yui, had attended school. Yui had taken Cinq's form in the dream, and the first time they'd met, she'd kicked Toji out of the school.

"This dream is brought to you by Mom…"

Kinda weird not letting your own kid know that he's dreaming, though…

"Hm?" He noticed a commotion in front of the classroom.

Are there more classes now?

"'Scuse me. Comin' through…"

Toji slipped through the crowd and then dropped his bag to the floor. The seats had been pushed to the walls. In the center of the classroom was a long, tube-like structure. Its entire length was covered with two to three classes' worth of curtains, whose excess flowed to the floor over its round nose. Toji didn't need to look under the fabric to know what it was.

How did an entry plug get in here?

Trois had arrived earlier and looked as surprised as her expressionless face allowed her to. She pointed at the windows. There was a thin line between them and the wall…

They broke the wall and carried it in here with construction equipment?! Of all the stupid…

Look inside, and I'll kick your ass.

There was a note stuck to the curtains. It was written on copy paper, in Asuka's handwriting. The students whispered and murmured. Things were even stranger than yesterday.

Crap, I really feel like apologizing to everyone here…

"Toji…" a voice said from behind.

He couldn't do anything yesterday, especially because this was Shinji's dream. Toji thought the same thing was going to happen today, which was why he was shocked when he turned around to meet the voice.

"This is what I think it is…isn't it?" Even Shinji was surprised at the presence of the object.

The door to the classroom burst open, and Asuka strutted in like a model. Her hair had been cut short, and it bounced with every step. She was like a living supercar, and everyone cleared the way for her.

Asuka was so happy that she actually looked a bit terrifying. A camera shutter clicked. Trois had taken a picture of her in the old uniform she'd sworn not to be caught dead in.

"I had a feeling you'd come," Trois said. "Six wanted me to take pictures."

"Oh, shove it," Asuka spat. She took a deep breath to compose herself. "Nice morning today, Shinji."

"I dunno, it looks like it's gonna rain," Toji said. He immediately received Asuka's bag to his face.

She walked over to Shinji, arms folded over her chest. "It's a nice morning because you get to see me again."

"Hey, Asuka. Yeah, I guess it is a good morning now," Shinji said.

"Very good." Asuka walked around the tube and pulled down the curtains.

Everyone in the know had already figured out that the object was an entry plug—Super Eva's, to be precise. But its sudden appearance in the classroom raised many eyebrows among the lay students.

"Ow…" Toji groaned as he got up.

There's going to be trouble later. Our classmates don't have clearance for this top secret stuff. But who gave the order? I don't think it was Misato. Could it have been Maya?!

"You can't be bringing that stuff to school," Shinji said.

"You say that like it's a bag of potato chips." Asuka pulled the lever to open the access door. The internal power supply hummed to life.

Asuka dragged one of the desks over and set it right next to the plug. She sat down and elbowed the center hatch. "Get in, Shinji."

"What? No."

Shinji immediately refused, but Asuka had been expecting that response.

"What are you talking about? You're in it already."

As soon as she finished her sentence, Shinji disappeared, to the confusion of everyone around them. Asuka peered through the center hatch to look at Shinji sitting in the plug.

"Don't worry, he's in here now. You can't just jump into the plug like that Shinji, it's creepy." Asuka stuck her tongue out.

Soryu… She knows it's a dream, so she used the power of her words to force Shinji into the plug. Toji was impressed. *But what now?*

"It saved me during the Battle at Nerv HQ three years ago, and it's stayed with me since, but Unit Two's gone now." Asuka said this as if she was starting a eulogy. "There was a battle last night. Six isn't here today because she's still asleep. She's the only one of us that can fight now, you know? It sucks… I could've fought, too, if I had an Eva…"

She paused.

"Shinji, where's your body now?"

So that's what she's up to! Toji finally understood. This was the solution to his problem.

Asuka had put Shinji inside the plug to answer this one question.

His dream was now playing only in this classroom, and only students were allowed in while it was playing. The dream eliminated anything it thought unnatural, which was why Asuka snuck the plug in before school started.

Wow… And to think she'd come up with this idea overnight!

"You and your Eva aren't bound by the same relationship other pilots have with their Evas. Did you forget that?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Are you sure?"

Yeah, you tell him, Soryu!

"Your heart is the Eva's heart. The Eva's body is your body. Neither of you can exist without the other. Remember?"

Shinji sank into the plug seat. "I do."

"And if you're here, that means…"

Toji noticed Rei Cinq beside him. She'd been watching Asuka do her work.

"You okay with this?" he asked. "She's going to drag Shinji out of the dream."

Cinq had warned him not to wake Shinji before kicking him out of class.

"Shinji might never wake again unless that girl does something. As it is, he's stuck going back and forth between his consciousness and the Eva's." Cinq look forlorn.

"Because he has less than a second to live?"

"Yes. I thought I'd allow them to meet. Even a second in a dream __"

"Can seem really long. I've heard of people who dream for days and wake up to find it's only been a few hours."

The woman bearing the fallen Cinq's resemblance smiled at Toji's comment.

"If she plays her cards right…the peak power of the Third Impact might be dammed up in exchange for his life." She sounded like she'd already accepted the end of things.

"Any other questions you want me to ask?"

“Goodness, you’re smarter than you look.”

My mother has gone to the other side.

That’s what Shinji had said the first time he came back to life through Super Eva’s heart.

And now she’s back to clean up after her son. Probably for the last time…

The legs of the desk Asuka sat on started rattling. She leaned over to look inside the entry plug like she was going to dive into it. She didn’t seem to notice Rei Cinq sitting next to Toji.

Well, no reason to tell her about it.

Asuka stood on the desk on her tiptoes, enjoying how the hem of her skirt swayed. Toji knew she still felt remorse over Cinq’s death. Breaking her heart now would be mean and pointless.

Something was happening.

No one in class knew what, but they were all giddy with anticipation.

“Welcome home, Asuka.” Shinji entered the activation sequence on his command console.

“Little late for that, buster…” But the warm welcome had caught her off guard. Asuka crossed her arms and leaned her chest into the pressure-resistant seal. Shinji touched her hair as it flowed from her shoulders.

“It’s been forever. Do you remember what happened when you were a synthesis?”

It should’ve been obvious to him that she was an entirely different person during that time, but that was just how Shinji’s innocence worked.

She thought about it. “Something about the way I picked up objects. It feels so different now. It’s jarring.”

Asuka had completed her recon mission from the moon at the cost of absorbing massive amounts of organic data into her body. To protect her identity, Eva-02 had assimilated all of it to create the Asuka/Eva synthesis, better known as Crimson A1.

“I can’t remember details, but I do have something like a continuous memory. Most of it is blank, and the peripherals are usually hazy, but I do remember what I was looking at and where I was going.”

She was once a giant who’d forgotten what words were, and yet she’d still been able to communicate and deceive. She’d lost the shackles of human pride and become unable to perceive the finer shades of morality. She was, in a sense, innocent.

But above all, she was unfettered. That was the one thing that had allowed people to identify the giant as Asuka.

“What if I said you were better as the synthesis?” Shinji joked.

Asuka smiled. “Very funny. Now cut the crap and get your body over here!”

“Yes, ma’am.”

I really am home… The realization finally sank in for her.

The virtual displays, which weren’t supposed to run on backup power, suddenly came to life, opening windows that projected onto the classroom ceiling as a pillar of light. The students gasped as they saw strange lights running across the surface of the entry plug.

“Everyone, back off! This isn’t supposed to happen!”

There was a sudden thud, followed by longitudinal tremors.

The shock was powerful enough to trigger the seismic sensors of the command center.

“Is there an earthquake?”

Misato, awakened from her thirty-minute nap, climbed to the command deck while checking the environmental map for aftershocks from Yomotsu Hirasaka. The new island wasn’t the culprit.

Regardless, the A.I. rang the alarm.

Aoba wheeled over to his console after almost choking on his tubular lunch.

“Sudden appearance of a massive entity underground, in the ruins of old Central Dogma! Subject estimated to be 3,500 tons in weight! A.I. thinks it might be hostile!”

“We’re getting attacked from underground now?! Hurry up on the

ID! Put out an emergency call for pilots and prepare the Lance of Longinus for immediate embarkation!" Misato ordered.

What could it be now that Armaros was gone?

"Is it more of the monsters from last night?!"

"Maybe it's Rei Quatre and Kaji in the mutant Eva!"

Everyone in the command center flung guesses left and right.

"Wait!" Hyuga shouted through the speakers to calm them down. "We're picking up an IFF signature! It's Super Eva's… No. It's the signature used by Unit One during the Battle at Nerv HQ three years ago!"

Maya was the first one down to the ruins of old Central Dogma.

She wanted to see it with her own eyes.

The black egg that was the Chronostatic Sphere had formed around Lilith, swallowing all of HQ and its surroundings. Former Nerv Commander Ikari Gendo and Dr. Akagi Ritsuko, along with several others, had also been trapped in the Sphere.

That was three years ago. Then, the black egg had been stolen by Armaros, leaving only the cavity where it had once lain.

A giant was now hunched over in that cavity. Its body was white hot, turning the water around it to steam.

"Super Eva!"

That was the first thing she thought of when she saw it. It was wrapped in orange, and its body was covered in restraint armor that looked very much like the old Eva-01.

"Yes. I suppose that's all you have 'over there.'"

The hulking figure leaned forward and put its hand up.

SMASH!

Compressed air tugged the hem of Maya's lab coat, blowing subterranean dust all over her body. Dr. Akagi's glasses were also carried away, smashed to a million pieces.

And yet the figure stood there, looking perfectly satisfied.

Maya smiled. She'd heard the voices of Ritsuko and Gendo in her

room, and this was proof that that conversation, at least, had been all in her head.

OMAKE

NEON GENESIS

CONCEPT GALLERY

EVANGELION: ANIMA

EVANGELION UNIT-00

First production Evangelion unit. Lacks weapon racks on its shoulders. Unsuitable for melee combat because of its weak engine output. Often equipped with a railgun for long-range combat.

EVANGELION UNIT-04

Sibling unit to Eva-03. Developed by Nerv U.S., it was unfortunately lost because of an engine failure during testing. Has an offset S2 Engine on its back.

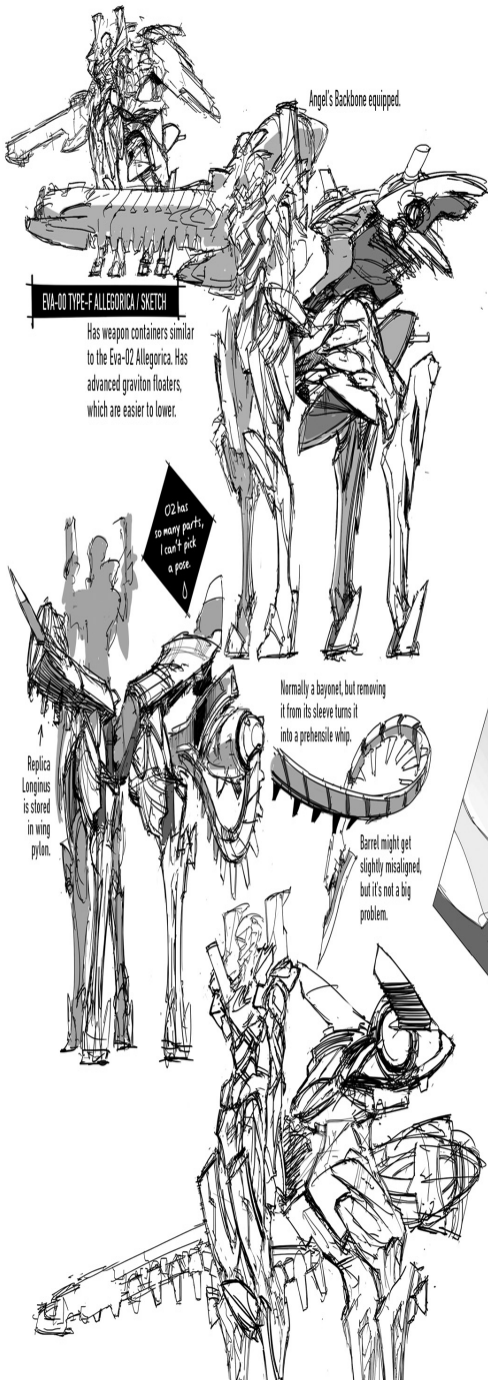
ILLUSTRATIONS: MAGAKI RYOTA

MASS-PRODUCTION EVA

Different stage of development compared to the movie version. Sensory organs are fully developed. Has graviton armatures mounted on its back, which allow for extended use. Its high output allows it to use a tin staff as a weapon.

NERV JAPAN HQ

Taking the lessons learned from Seele's last attack, Nerv Japan has modified its base of operations to be made of mobile blocks. From the front, the base is made of a command block, an armory block, a storage block, and an information block. The hangar is equipped with a mass driver to launch Evas. Usually moves in orbit, although it moves underground during emergencies.


Angel's Backbone equipped.
EVA-00 TYPE-F ALLEGORICA / SKETCH
Has weapon containers similar to the Eva-02 Allegorica. Has advanced graviton floaters, which are easier to lower.
02 has so many parts, I can't pick a pose.
Normally a bayonet, but removing it from its sleeve turns it into a prehensile whip.
Replica Longinus is stored in wing pylon.
Barrel might get slightly misaligned, but it's not a big problem.

UNIMPORTANT TIDBIT FROM OUTSIDE THE NOVELIZATION

With the exception of Shinji and Six, Nerv Japan plugsuits come with heels. It was a personal request from Asuka so she could be the same height as Shinji. The heels kept getting higher and higher, to the point where Trois actually tripped on some steps while she was walking in them. The orichalcum suit reproduced them perfectly.

I forgot I had this drawing of the Asuka/Eva synthesis without her visor on. Keeping the visor was the right choice.

SUPER EVA RETURNS!

ROAD TO EVA-01 FINAL MODEL

Where will it go, what will it lead to?

WHAT SHAPE?

There wasn't much detail in Super Eva's hands when he became a figure, so I had to give them a bit more thought. Now, they're a lot thicker. I hope that clears some things up.

I MIGHT AS WELL GO ALL OUT.

Looks more advanced with its crystal formations, but still retro. Just as promised.

OCCULT LOOK?

Evas have had a mean appearance to them since the beginning, but this one looks like a straight-up villain.

So, about the new Eva. It's like Unit-01 went to the gym.

Guess I'll add more shoulder pylons...

First there was 1

Then there was 2

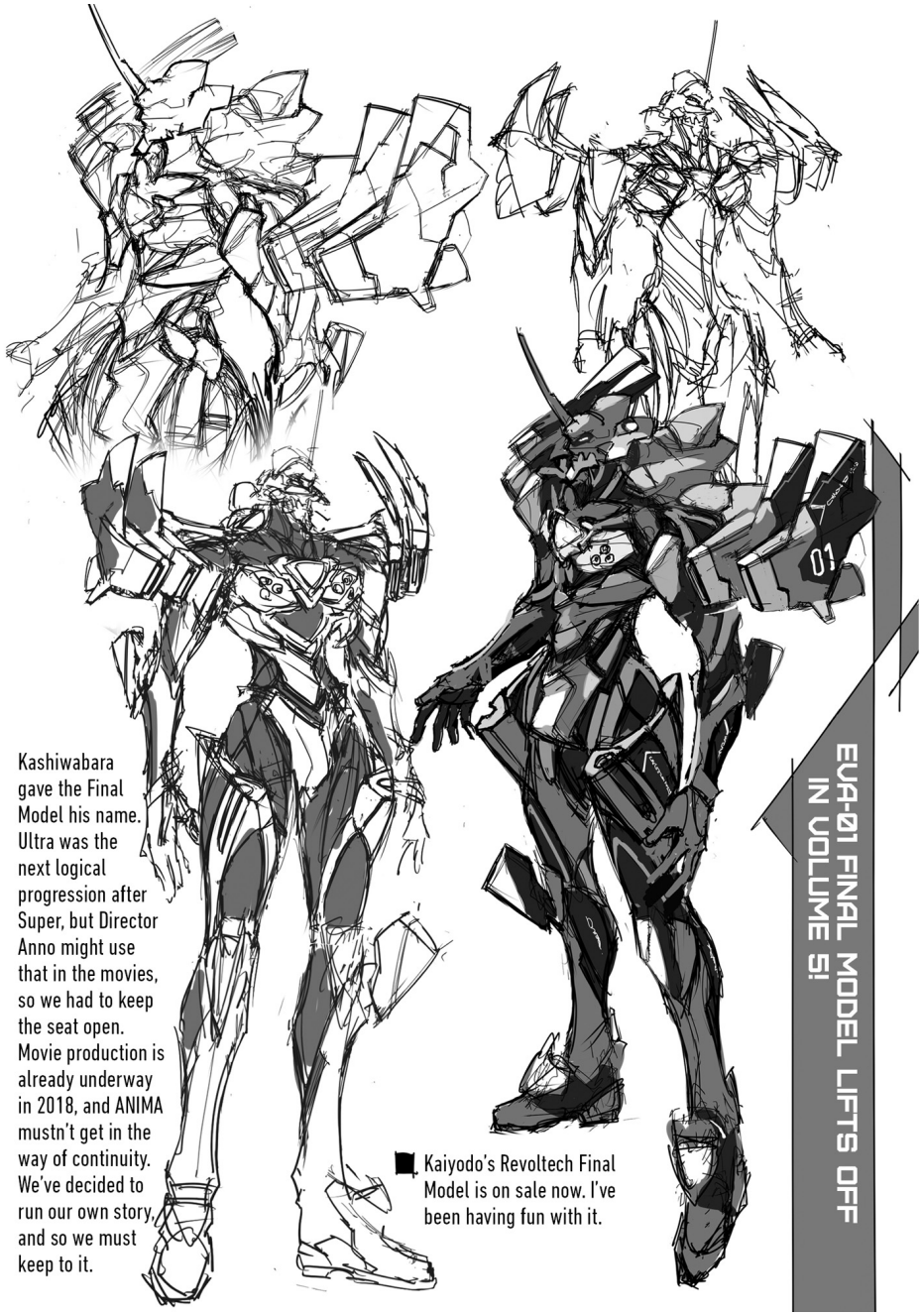
2 more for 4

Big and Strong

Grade school logic.

But this is what drawing mechs is all about.

I'm seconds away from giving him 6 shoulder pylons.



EVA-01 FINAL MODEL LIFTS OFF IN VOLUME 5!

Kashiwabara gave the Final Model his name. Ultra was the next logical progression after Super, but Director Anno might use that in the movies, so we had to keep the seat open. Movie production is already underway in 2018, and ANIMA mustn't get in the way of continuity. We've decided to run our own story, and so we must keep to it.

■ Kaiyodo's Revoltech Final Model is on sale now. I've been having fun with it.

Postscript

Neon Genesis Evangelion: ANIMA, Volume 4 contains chapters serialized in *Dengeki Hobby Magazine* from September 2011 to July 2012.

I had to be careful with Yomotsu Hirasaka because of the tragic Tohoku earthquake. I had a lot of mixed feelings about that. If a story isn't planned to be elaborate, then you should advance it as fast as you can. That way, at the very least, it won't be boring. But I have to admit that the story felt stale during the first act because the plot didn't advance until the second act. Even I got irritated at it during editing. But I had to wait until things had calmed down in the real world before I could send giants rampaging around Hakone again. My current editor chewed my ear out because they thought it was supposed to end after the manga segment.

The next volume is the last, and that is when *ANIMA* will end. I have to say, Shinji and Eva-01 warp around way too much.

—Ikuto Yamashita,
Evangelion Mecha Designer

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